

IBM NetVista A60

Ultimate performance for maximum computing
Pentium 4 processor 1.30GHz
128MB PC 600 RDRAM
20GB HDD
48X-20X CD-ROM
10/100 Ethernet
32MB NVIDIA TNT2 graphics
Windows 2000
Microsoft Office 2000 Small Business
17" monitor (15.9" viewable, Part #17MONB1)

\$1,599

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alue).

Part #683320U

SuccessLease for Small Business \$57/MO., 36 MOS.

HP OfficeJet T45 All-in-One (Part #01N1369) \$299.99 or \$11/month

IBM NetVista A60

Ultimate performance for maximum computing
Pentium 4 processor 1.50GHz
256MB PC 600 RDRAM
60GB HDD
12X/8X/32X-8X CD-ROM
10/100 Ethernet
Windows 2000 Professional
Microsoft Office 2000 Small Business
17* monitor (15.9* viewable, Part #17MONB1)
Part #68336f1U

IBM NetVista X40

Bold, space-saving design
Pentium III processor 933MHz
128MB RAM
20GB HDD
24X-10X CD-ROM
10/100 Ethernet
Windows 2000
Lotus® SmartSuite® Millennium Edition®
15" TFT display
Part #664332U

\$2,439

SuccessLease for Small Business \$86/MO., 36 MOS.

IBM InfoPrint 12 Laser Printer (Part #4912001) \$399 or \$14/month

\$2,499

SuccessLease for Small Business \$88/MO., 36 MOS.

HP DeskJet 932C Color Printer (Part #01N1364) \$199.99 or \$7/month

IBM ThinkPad A21m

Desktop alternative

Mobile Pentium III processor 800MHz
featuring Intel SpeedStep™ technology
14.1" XGA TFT display
Ultrabay 2000 8X-2X DVD-ROM
Mini PCI 56K V90 modem
64MB SDRAM • 20GB upgradable HDD
4MB ATI Rage Mobility M graphics
Windows 98 Second Edition
Lotus SmartSuite Millennium Edition
3.7-hour™ Li-lon battery
ThinkPad Button
6.7 lbs. travel weight
Part #264727U

\$2,399

SuccessLease for Small Business \$85/MO., 36 MOS.

ThinkPad Dock (Part #263110U) \$499 or \$18/month

IBM ThinkPad X2

Ultraportable
Mobile Pentium III processor 600MHz featuring Intel SpeedStep technology
121* XGA TFT display
128MB SDRAM * 20GB upgradable HDD
Mini PCI 56K V90 modem
4MB SDRAM ATI Rage Mobility M graphics
Windows 98 Second Edition
Lotus SmartSuite Millennium Edition
3.5-hour Li-lon battery
Titanium Composite cover*
ThinkPad Button
3.5 lbs. travel weight
Part #266231U

\$2,599

SuccessLease for Small Business \$92/MO., 36 MOS.

UltraBase X2 Media Slice for X20 (Part #08N1180) \$199 or \$7/month

IBM ThinkPad T2

Performance and portability
Mobile Pentium III processor 800MHz
featuring Intel SpeedStep technology
14.1" XGA TFT display
128MB SDRAM • 20GB upgradable HDD
Ultrabay 2000 • 8X-2X DVD-ROM
Mini PCI 56K V90 modem
8MB SGRAM Savage IX8 graphics
Windows 98 Second Edition
Lotus SmartSuite Millennium Edition
3.5-hour Li-lon battery
Titanium Composite cover
ThinkPad Button
4.6 lbs. travel weight
Part #264747U

\$2,999

SuccessLease for Small Business \$106/MO., 36 MOS.

HP DeskJet 350C Portable Printer (Part #19K5690) \$279.99 or \$10/month

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The right blend of price and performance
Pentium III processor 1.0GHz • Dual processor capable
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Max internal storage of 218.4GB/no HDD std
Support for 6 hot-swap hard drives
3.5° floppy disk drive • 40X-17X CD-ROM
Integrated 10/100 Ethernet
Integrated dual Ultra160 SCSI controller
5 available slots/8 available bays
Advanced system management processor
Light-Path Diagnostics • Predictive Failure Analysis®
Toolless chassis
Tower design with optional 5U rack mounting
3-year limited onsite warranty
Part #865861Y

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SuccessLease for Small Business \$99/MO., 36 MOS.

IBM 20/40GB DDS/4 Internal Tape Drive (Part #00N7991) \$879 or \$ 31/month

IBM @server vSarias 330

Rack dense 1U server for demanding e-business applications
Pentium III processor 933MHz
Dual processor capable
256MB memory std/4GB max
Max internal storage of 72.8GB/no HDD std
2 available hot-swap drive bays
3.5" floppy disk drive • 24X-10X CD-ROM
Integrated dual 10/100 Ethernet
2 available PCI slots
Enhanced Light-Path Diagnostics
Cable Chaining Technology – eliminates
up to 120 cables in a full rack!
3-year limited onsite warranty
Part #865441Y

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SuccessLease for Small Business \$104/MO., 36 MOS.

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NEW IBM @server xSeries 340

A 3U server engineered for business-critical reliability and scalability
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Max internal storage of 218.4GB/no HDD std
3 available hot-swap drive bays/optional support for 6
Hot-swap power and fans with optional redundancy
3.5" floppy disk drive • 24X-10X CD-ROM
Integrated dual Ultra160 SCSI controller
Integrated 10/100 Ethernet • 5 available PCI slots
Advanced system management processor
Light-Path Diagnostics
3U rack optimized design
3-year limited onsite warranty
Part #86566RY

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SuccessLease for Small Business \$116/MO., 36 MOS.

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IBM NetVista A20m

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10/100 Ethernet Microsoft® Windows® Millennium Edition Microsoft Office 2000 Small Business⁶ 15" monitor (13.9" viewable, Part #15MONB1) Part #6280S1U

IBM NetVista A40

Stability and manageability Intel Pentium® III processor 1.0GHz 128MR RAM 20GB HDD 48X-20X CD-ROM 10/100 Ethernet Microsoft Windows 2000 17" monitor (15.9" viewable, Part #17MONW1)

\$899

SuccessLease™ for Small Business ^{\$}**32/MO.**7, 36 MOS.

\$1.499

Part #6578TAU

SuccessLease for Small Business \$53/MO., 36 MOS.

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lomega Zip 250MB Ext. USB Drive (Part #10K3506) \$179.99 or \$6/month Add Microsoft Office 2000 Small Business to any of these NetVista desktops for an additional cost (a \$479 value)

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Desktop alternative Mobile Intel Celeron processor 650MHz 12.1" SVGA TFT display 64MB SDRAM • 20GB HDD Ultrabay™ 2000 24X-10X CD-ROM Integrated 56K V.90 modem 4MB ATI Rage Mobility M graphics Microsoft Windows 98 Second Edition Lotus SmartSuite Millennium Edition ThinkPad Button 6.7 lbs. travel weight Part #265521U



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\$1.6 billion worth of computer hardware, media and software.





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Introduction by Steve Schwartz, Reviews by Rick Broida With fast Pentium III and Athlon processors, 128MB of RAM, and roomy 20GB or 30GB hard drives, today's selection of sub-\$1,000 PCs gives you a lot of computer for your money.



• ABS AMD Web Special • Dell Dimension L866

• NuTrend Athlon Special • Tiny Value Select 900-A

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PHOTO PRINTERS

by David English

If your old inkjet isn't making the grade for printing your digital images, consider a photo printer. These four new models, priced between \$199 and \$999, can give your pictures the professional look you've been seeking.



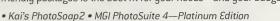
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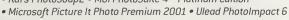
• Lexmark Z82 Color Jetprinter • Olympus P-400

Photo Ops...

PHOTO-EDITING SOFTWARE Turn your desktop computer into a photo-editing workshop with

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by Rick Broida

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by John Woram

All set for your trek to Turkmenistan? We didn't think so. When you're getting ready to travel off the beaten path, you'll want to research your trip on the Web. We'll show you how.

Computer Shopper (ISSN 0886-0556) is published monthly, for \$24.97 per year in the US. and \$70.97 per year outside the US., by ZD Inc., a CNET Networks company, 28 E. 28th St., New York, NY. 10016-7930. Periodicals Mail postage paid at New York, NY. and additional mailing offices. Canadian GST registration number is 140496720 RT. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Computer Shopper, PO. Box \$2568, Boulder, CO 80328-2568. Entire contents Copyright ©2001 ZD Inc. All rights reserved. To reuse any material in this publication, submit a permission request form online at www.lcopyright.com/zijflavis/. For more information, or to have a permission request form sent to you, please call (425) 430-1663, fax (242) 430-1663, so, or emal zijflavic@lopyright.com. For high-quality reprints, minimum quantity of 100, please contact Reprint Services by calling (651) 582-3800, faxing (651) 633-1862, or e-mailing zdreprints@reprintservices.com. Material in this publication may not be reproduced in any form without written permission. "Computer Shopper" and "Computer Shopper Best Buy of the Year" are trademarks of ZD Inc. ZDNet is a registered service mark of ZD Inc. ZDNet Logo is a service mark of ZD Inc.

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Net Now

Your shareware may be watching you. Plus, Kozmo.com gives away Net-ready cell phones, La-Z-Boy lets you surf while reclining, American Express and Discover Card help you e-shop incognito, and more.

Hot Gear

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best buys

Let our editors help you select the greatest desktop computers, PC peripherals, mobile gear, software, and games....



Web pointers to expanded coverage on ZDNet.

is it a notebook
that doubles as
an entertainment
center Or an
entertainment
center that
doubles as a
notebook? yes.





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business buyer



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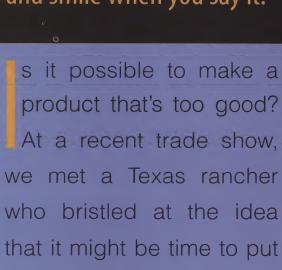
Irreverent musings about tech products involving Britney Spears, Claudia Schiffer, and Dennis Miller. Plus, a twisted Amazon.com purchase circle, and Usenet anarchy

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JANICE CHEN



Saving and Spending

ub-\$1,000 PCs have traditionally been anemic machines that would be adequate for neophytes, but woefully wimpy for more advanced users. Loading a white-knuckle shooter like Quake III or editing hefty digital images would have been irksome, if not impossible, on these slowpoke systems.

Today's bargain-price PCs are another story. We rounded up four of the latest under-a-grand PCs and were astonished by

their ample features and muscular capabilities. Ranging from an 866MHz Pentium III to a 1.1GHz Athlon, these powerhouses were packed with 128MB of RAM, at least 20GB of hard drive space, DVD-

ROM drives, and even top-notch 3D graphics cards. Turn to "Penny-Wise and Powerful" on p. 100 to find out what else you'll get for \$999 or less.

Pay less for a fully loaded PC, and you won't want to pay more for upgrade components and peripherals. Our feature on technology shopping portals will tell you where the bargains are (p. 130). Whether you're looking for hard-to-find items such as proprietary memory for an ancient NeXTstation (remember those?) or just trying to pinch every last penny on a new PDA, these all-in-one shopping sites can cut down hours of searching. They'll quickly locate Web merchants that stock the prod-

uct you're looking for and deliver on-the-fly

price comparisons. Some even factor in tax and shipping when delivering bottom-line

> After all that smart shopping, you may want to spend your savings on a dream vacation. It's certainly no secret that you can book tickets and reserve hotel rooms online. What you

may not know, though, is that the Web can be even more helpful than a dedicated travel agent when you're trekking off the beaten path. It's a great resource for accurate information, often through detailed local sites, for less-traveled destinations like the Galápagos Islands or the Falkland Islands. Check out our special report "Surfin' Safari" on p. 142 to discover how to let the Web do the walking when you research your next travel adventure.

> If you're off to lands distant and exotic—or even if you're vacationing a little closer to home—you'll

> > probably be packing a digital camera. But what if those sunset shots of your tropical paradise ended up some-what less than postcard worthy? Not to worry:

The photo-editing tools in this month's software roundup (p. 124) enable you to make any digital snapshot picture-perfect. The four consumer-friendly photo-editing applications we review are easy enough for the casual

> user, but powerful enough to please the most avid amateur photo

To make sure you've got something tangible to show for your retouching efforts, don't miss our roundup of photo printers on p. 112. The four

new models we tested offer a wide range of functionality, from the straightforward photo inkjet printer to one of the first fullpage dye-sublimation printers to break the \$1,000 price barrier. While some are better values than others, all will give you printouts to be proud of.

Finally, for the video auteur in all of us, this month's Tune-Up article on p. 202 will show you how easy it can be to turn your PC into a DVD-quality video editor. Our step-by-step guide demonstrates how to take those camcorder vacation videos and turn them into a movie masterpiece. You can be your own director, even with a \$999 PC.

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FEEDBACK FORUM

THIS FAN'S NOT SO COOL

In your review of the Sony VAIO PCG-SR17K (February, p. 94) you didn't consider one very important drawback. At first glance, no one really notices, but on the PCG-SR series, Sony put the cooling fan on the bottom. People buy this computer for portability and travel, but with the fan on the bottom, you can place it only on hard surfaces such as desks. This eliminates working surfaces such as couches and laps. When I travel overseas, I hardly ever find I have a flat surface to work on. This design flaw also eliminates any lazy relaxing with this computer. I bought a laptop so I could use it anywhere, and have been turned down in this quest for freedom.

JOSH JONES



GET SERIOUS

I recently began reading Computer Shopper and have found it an informative addition to my regular reading. However, it seems 90 percent of your reviews are geared toward the recreational-gaming segment. Not all of us use our computers solely for games. Who cares if a piece of hardware will run Quake? I wonder how it will do when I'm trying to render 20 minutes of animation in 3D Studio Max, or when I'm trying to edit an 80MB, 1,200-dpi scan in Photoshop with numerous filters and color-correction tools running at the same time. I love your information, but it seems too often you ignore professional users, especially visual-media professionals. It would be nice to see a highly technical magazine such as yours geared more toward professional content creation.

MICHAEL PALMISANO

< COMING NEXT MONTH >

Nothing But Net

Getting onto the Net is a snap, thanks to a new generation of Internet appliances. We take a look at several of the coolest, slickest models to show you why the Age of the Appliance may be just around the corner.

A Farewell to Floppies

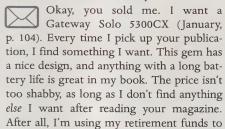
The 3.5-inch floppy drive is finally on its way out. Will CD-RW be the replacement of choice? Our Shopper's Guide examines the state of removable storage, from

"super-floppies" such as Zip and LS-120 drives to optical solutions such as DVD-RAM.

Wallets Get Wired

 Shopping on the Internet is convenient-unless you count having to enter your name, address, and creditcard number over and over. Tired of the data entry? Check out our guide to digital wallets.

LAPTOP VS. LAP OF LUXURY



PAUL DALE ROBERTS

BROADBAND ON MY MIND

get this laptop.

I've read Computer Shopper for as long as my dad has subscribed to it. I enjoy the information on new technologies, especially those connected with the Internet. I've been a regular Internet user since the days when my 25MHz 486 PC was nearly the state of the art and Prodigy was the online service to use. Living in a small rural town in Georgia, I never thought I'd see broadband down here. Now I have DSL, and getting it installed was easy. USB made the install a snap. Cable is less common, but even that will soon be available. If broadband's a topic of discussion in high schools, that tells you something about its availability. Kudos on the great magazine and continued success in your mastery of all things tech.

JASON MAXWELL

The editors of Computer Shopper want to hear from you. Write to:

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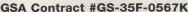
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Shareware: Sharing Too Much?

ver browsed the Web site of the local symphony orchestra, only to receive a call from the symphony's telemarketers a few hours later? It's no coincidence, says Steve Gibson, founder of Gibson Research Corp., a California-based software publisher. The culprit may be "spyware"—software that lurks on your machine and collects information, then surreptitiously sends it to software makers over the Internet.

Gibson and other privacy advocates contend that many popular programs, including RealNetworks' RealDownload, Netscape's Smart Download, GoZilla, and PKZIP for Windows, are spyware. This type of software has access to a wealth of information on your PC, including the Web sites you visit, your name, your phone number, your e-mail address, and even a unique code that identifies your PC. The information can be used to send targeted banner advertising or even build a personal profile



linked to your real name, which can then be sold to advertisers.

Software companies, however, deny any such goings-on. "Any use of RealDownload is completely anonymous, and its communications features are clearly disclosed and optional to the user," says RealNetworks spokesman David Brotherton. "Upon installation, users are informed that download URLs can be anonymously transmitted, and we offer a clear choice to opt out of even that. There are no unique identifiers transmitted with any transactions that would enable us to link download requests to individuals."

Should the average comput-

er user be concerned? "I have found that people are widely and diametrically divided on this issue," Gibson says. "Many people just shrug and say 'Who cares?' Other people are righteously outraged by the idea that any data about them is being collected and aggregated."

One way to avoid privacy piracy is to read those user agreements that most of us blithely scroll through. If it's too late for that, you can check your system for spyware at Spychecker.com (www. spychecker.com).

Keep in mind that merely uninstalling the offending software may well leave the spyware features intact and continuing to transmit. More thorough options include using a product such as the free firewall ZoneAlarm (www.zonealarm. com), or Ad-aware (www. lavasoft.de/aaw), free software that scans for and disables spyware. Or, of course, you could always pay for the non-ad-supported version of the software.

-Kevin Savetz

AIMing For Files

imster (www.aimster.com), the Napster-like instantmessaging and file-swapping plug-in for AOL Instant Messenger, allows users to chat and trade files on other Internet file-swapping services. More than 2.5 million AOL members already use Aimster, and the new version 3.0 will broaden its appeal by expanding the capability to other messaging platforms, including MSN, Yahoo, Napster, and ICQ.

Aimster spokesman Johnny Deep predicts the new version will draw 2 million new users every month. Many of those newcomers, he believes, will employ Aimster 3.0 to create an ad hoc network. The free product will appeal to small and medium-size businesses that don't have a corporate



Tracking files, instantly

network but want to enable employees to share messages and files, he says.

In addition to expanded capabilities, the new version has a customizable, TV-like interface that will simplify use. Aimster plans to offer add-on applications on a subscription basis. -Elaine X. Grant

FLAT-PANEL DISPLAYS

The lowest prices on LCD monitors found on computershopper.com

ViewSonic VE150 \$675 1,024x768 resolution, analog signal, no speakers, no USB, viewing angles:

Princeton APP520 \$892 1,024x768 resolution, analog signal, no speakers, no USB, viewing angles: 60 degrees horizontal, 55 degrees

Samsung SyncMaster

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IBM T54H \$1,052 1,024x768 resolution,

digital/analog signal, no speakers, no USB, viewing angles: 75 degrees horizontal, 75 degrees vertical

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\$700

120 degrees horizontal,

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HP L1510 \$808

1,024x768 resolution, analog signal, no speakers, no USB, viewing angles: 120 degrees horizontal. 95 degrees vertical

\$1,000

Eizo FlexScan L350 \$999 1,024x768 resolution, analog signal, no speakers, no USB, viewing angles: 140 degrees horizontal, 120 degrees vertical

Compaq TFT5010 \$1,099

1,024x768 resolution, digital/ analog signal, no speakers, USB optional, viewing angles: 120 degrees horizontal, 100 degrees vertical

Source: computershopper.com, January 11

ViewSonic VE150

Keep Your Palms Clean

esktop users have long had to contend with destructive bugs such as Melissa and I Love You. Owners of the popular Palm OS handhelds may soon have viruses of their own. So far, only three relatively harmless Palm strains have been detected (a Trojan horse called Liberty Crack, and viruses called Phage and Vapor), but experts say others are sure to appear, particularly as handhelds become integrated with the Net and e-mail.

'Viruses haven't been a

problem, but as we see more people adopting Palms I think you're going to see a lot more virus threats," says Sam Curry, security architect at McAfee.com.

Software compa-

nies are prepared.

Symantec Corp. is
testing an antivirus
program for Palm devices, planning to make a full version
available by the end of March.
Users can download a free beta

version at www.symantec.com/avcenter/palmscanner.html.

McAfee.com Corp. provides a range of antivirus and opti-

mization programs for Palms and other handhelds. For \$29.95, Palm users can buy an annual subscription to the Wireless Security Center (www. mcafee.com/wireless), which includes a resident virus scanner, a scanner for synchronous transmis-

sions, a program that checks for suspicious activity, and a broadcast service that alerts users to the latest threats. —Elaine X. Grant

KOZMO CALLING

nternet delivery service Kozmo.com is eager to hear from you. So eager, in fact, that it's offering a free cell phone (after rebates) that will enable one-button dialing for delivery of items ranging from movies to snacks to CD players. The branded phones will be provided in conjunction with wireless-service company InPhonic in the nine cities in which Kozmo.com operates.

The goal, says Andrew Resnick, Kozmo.com's senior vice president of marketing: "Service customers wherever they are." Ordering by cell phone, for instance, would allow an executive en route to a meeting to schedule a gift basket to arrive when he does.

Curiously, though the phones are Internet-ready, Kozmo.com does not offer a wireless portal. Wireless customers must place orders through the company's telephone number, which is preprogrammed into the phone. Kozmo.com is also likely to deliver text-based advertisements to the device.



A Kozmo-branded Internet phone

And note that the phone is free, but the wireless service is not. Depending on location, customers can choose from traditional wireless plans offered by AT&T, Verizon, and others.

Resnick believes that the real value of the promotion is the phone itself. Other retailers provide free phones with service plans, but Kozmo.com, he

says, offers a better assortment of higher-quality phones. At press time, the only free phone offered was the Ericsson R280LX—free, that is, if you're willing to wait for not one, but two rebate checks.

Even so, if you need constant access to Kozmo.com, a free cell phone could be the connection you're looking for.

-Adam Fisher

PIGGYBANK.COM

Six-year-old Austin Ellsworth has a piggy bank, and he knows how to add and subtract. His mother, Shari, hopes that Austin soon will be counting his pennies online. "It's a great way for him to learn about financial responsibility," she says. "And it's where banking will be going anyway."

There are already a number of tools to help Austin learn about online banking. From the Escambia County Employees Credit Union's KidSavers program to the Hawaiian Tel Employees Federal Credit Union's Kids Club, banks are set-

ting up special savings accounts, waiving fees, and offering Web content for children to learn about money. Some banks, such as the **Republic Bank of Florida**, which offers a program called Cool Bank (www.coolbank.com), partner with schools and provide online tools and educational materials that



Austin, saving himself

count toward school credit.

You'll also find organizations like **Banking On Kids** (www.bankingonkids.com) and **Save For America** (www.saveforamerica.org) that offer specific programs for in-school partnerships for online banking. Banking On Kids provides a student-run bank at the elementary-school level; Save For America's program targets a wider age group and is approved by the U.S. Department of Education. Both require bank sponsorship.

Banks aren't alone in offerings to the youth market. **DoughNet** (www.doughnet.com) combines some educational material with a credit account so

children can make online purchases. Parents set up the account and choose where and how the money can be spent.

And that should make Shari Ellsworth feel a bit more comfortable. "I want to make sure there is some kind of safety net so that Austin doesn't buy anything without me knowing," she says.

—Steven Abrams

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SONY VPL-CS2

Multimedia Projector

By adopting newlydeveloped 0.7 inch LCD panels, Sony has produced a new category of LCD projector the "Ultra-



Personal". Weighing less than 7 lbs. the VPL-CS2 produces 600 ANSI lumens of brightness at native SVGA resolution. This allows for brilliant images under most any lighting conditions.

SONY DCR-PC110

DV Camcorder

The DCR-PC110 Mega Handycam additionaly features a special Carl Zeiss T* Lens Coating, video-mail feature, automatic pop-up flash for quality still images and multiple connectivity options like a USB terminal, i.Link (in/out).

SONY DAV-S300

Home Theater In A Box

Making the "home theater in a box" concept a reality, the incredibly affordable DAV-S300 integrates a



combination receiver/DVD player with a 6speaker package and all the speaker wire needed. Easy to install and easy to use.

Panasonic. KX-TG2000B

Cordless Phone System

The KX-TG2000B 2.4GHz multi-handset cordless phone systems combine the advantages of a business-style telephone system with the convenience and mobility of 2.4GHz cordless operation, Call Transfer, Message Transfer, Deliver Message, Auto Message

SONY MZ-R70PC

Portable MiniDisc Player/Recorder

The world's smallest and lightest MD recorder, the ultracompact MZ-R70PC is almost as small as a playback-only MD Walkman yet it is packed with powerful editing and playback features Includes PCLink (USB cable, PCLink converter, mini-mini stereo cable) for recording music files from Internet. 40 Seconds Shock Resistant Memory. Up to 17 hours Playback with Sony "AA" Alkaline battery

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SONY DEJ-925

Portable CD Player



The D-EJ925 would be a major contender. It's slim (only 9/16" thick!). It's strong (featuring a die-cast titanium body). And when it comes to battery life, it's got some serious stamina The D-EJ925 gives you up to

80 hours of playback, using the supplied NiMH rechargeable battery pack and 2 (optional) "AA"s in the supplied external case. Go anywhere and do just about anything - this portable can keep the

JVC HR-DVS1

Mini DV/S-VHS Dual Deck



A double deck, the HR-DVS1U incorporates a Mini DV VCR and an S-VHS VCR, allowing

direct playback of S-VHS or Mini DV tapes Direct dubbing from S-VHS to Mini DV and vice versa, or connect directly to your DV camcorder for DV-to-DV edits

SONY. DCR-VX2000

3-CCD DV CAMCORDER The DCR-VX2000.

incorporates state-of-the-art CCDs to deliver even higher resolution images, a highquality 2 1/2-inch plasma LCD screen enabling instant playback, and the ability to capture still images either direct to Memory Stick media or from a single frame of video footage. Still images are saved in 640 x 480 (VGA) image size, making them useful as "still video grabs" during filming or for transferring into documents, e-mails or onscreen presentations

Garmin StreetPilot Color

GPS System

The StreetPilot GPS ColorMap takes up where the StreetPilot leaves off. ColorMap features a razor-sharp, high-resolution, 16-

color display for easy map reading, offers five times the number of waypoints (points of interest that can be marked with individual names and symbols) and double the number of Tracklog Points. It also includes a cigarette lighter adapter, PC cable and dashboard mount.



VE THE SUPERHIGH

ou've got the Internet on your desktop. You've got the Internet on your cell phone. Are you ready for the Internet in your car?

You'd better be. Automakers General Motors Corp. and Ford Motor Co. have announced plans to offer the Internet on wheels in the very near future. Not surprisingly, even Microsoft Corp. wants to make a browser for your

GM's Virtual Advisor system promises access to stock quotes, prerecorded news stories, and e-mail. Better yet, it will offer totally hands-free operation via voice commands, says Mike Peterson, Virtual Advisor product director.

GM has even teamed with Sun Microsystems to create an operating system for the car. The project could result in, for instance, a platform that recognizes a user immediately, automatically switches calls from his or her cell phone to the car phone, and updates the user's personal organizer.



Microsoft's plans involve a car-centric operating system based on the XML standard. Microsoft's Car. Net initiative aims to create a seamless flow of communication between environments and devices, including technologies that work across multiple software platforms.

Why the big push for the information superhighway on the highway? According to a recent Goldman Sachs study, Americans

spend 26 billion hours in their cars every year. And that signals a potentially huge market for car-based Internet services.

—Adam Fisher

AN INTERNET **EXPLORER FOR THE** SEDENTARY SET

Surfing the Internet at your desk too tiring? Then settle into the Microsoft WebTV Explorer Recliner by La-Z-Boy (www.lazyboy.com).

While relaxing in your new Explorer "e-cliner," you can check e-mail, surf the Web, and watch interactive TV until your

adapter, and a foldout WebTV keyboard, which acts as a remote control for the included Internet receiver, all tucked inside the left armrest. But the fun doesn't stop there: The right armrest contains the all-important drink holder and a storage space the company describes as "ideal for holding a remote control and TV Guide."

cal outlet, a DSL port, an AC

The idea behind the Explorer was to make the famous recliners "more relevant in today's

> world," says Kevin Wixted, La-Z-Boy's director of marketing. "It's the perfect combination of high tech and high comfort." Wixted adds that the Explorer may appeal to those who want to use the Web but don't want to invest in (or bother with) a complete PC setup, as well as to parents in households where the existing computer is monopolized by the younger generation.

The Explorer, available at La-Z-Boy dealers nationwide, sells for \$1,049 in fab-

ric and \$1,299 in leather or vinyl. The subscription for WebTV Plus Interactive is an extra \$14.95 to \$24.95 a month.

Camouflage Credit Cards

Shopping on the Internet is convenient, cost-effective, and sometimes even fun. It also requires a credit card. Even if you aren't afraid of a hacker stealing your credit-card number and treating himself to a spending spree, you might worry about a marketer generating an unauthorized profile of your buying habits.

Assuage these concerns with free programs from Discover Card and American Express. Discover's deskshop and American Express' Private Payments allow you to shop anonymously by using an electronic-wallet program that generates single-use numbers billed to your account, in place of your regular account number. Deskshop even allows the numbers to be used on a recurring basis, for ongoing purchases at the same merchant, for exam--Elaine X. Grant ple, or for monthly payments.

Of course, you'll need either a Discover or American Express card, and you'll have to shop at Web sites that accept them. You'll also have to download the services' electronic-



E-Shoppers Anonymous

wallet software and use it while you shop. (The form-filling and record-keeping functions make it worth the effort.)

While anonymous e-commerce may provide peace of mind for some, the companies, unfortunately, still know where to send the bill.

-Kiersten Conner-Sax

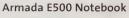


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ILLUSTRATION BY BEK SHAKIROV

WE BET IT TASTES LIKE CHICKEN

veryone knows you can find some pretty tasteless material on the Web. But Atlanta-based **Trisenx** believes the entire Internet is tasteless—and scentless to boot. The company is on a mission to do something about that.

In its quest to make Web browsing a multisensory experience, Trisenx (www.trisenx.com) has already brought the world the MultiSenx scent device, a PC peripheral that mixes and dispenses aromas. It will soon ship a more advanced Senx with new Scent Design Studio software that will enable you to concoct your own fragrances. With these tools you'll be able to participate in events such as "Aroma-Fest, The World's First

Online Scent Chat."

But smell is only the beginning. Trisenx is developing a 7.5x10inch device that can be loaded with up to 200 "flavor cartridges." It will work like an inkjet printer and dispense the requested flavor onto an edible potato-based wafer, says Kathey Porter, marketing director for Trisenx. "It dissolves in your mouth like a communion wafer, so there is nothing to alter the taste of the product," Porter says. You won't be able to savor the flavors until the device is released in early 2002, however.

Trisenx has partnered with fragrance-and-flavor giant Mane to provide the delicately balanced chemical mixtures that will enable you to visit, say, Taco Bell's Web site and sample its latest delicacies. The device



could be a boon to international food companies developing new products, which will be able to share their research in a nonperishable form. But Trisenx also sees applications in entertainment, education, and communications with online greeting cards and e-mail, according to Porter.

If Trisenx's hardware catches on, an e-mail from your ex might literally be bitter. And what will unsolicited e-mail taste like? Why, Spam, of course. —Kevin Shay

Crossing Off Lost URLs

Tired of reading about an interesting Web site, only to forget the address by the time you're on the Net? Now you can capture URLs with a swipe of a pen.

The Cross Convergence pen comprises a body by venerable penmaker A.T. Cross and brains from Digital Convergence, makers of the free CueCat bar-code scanner. Unlike the CueCat, however, the Cross Convergence is completely mobile, says John Buckley, an A.T. Cross spokesman for the project. "You will have all the benefits of the CueCat, except that you will be able to access those benefits anywhere, anytime—on a plane, on a train."

Or, conceivably, on a boat or with a goat, if you happen to be reading a publication that covers hooved herbivores. Each URL within articles or advertising includes a coded "cue" that you scan with the pen's optical eye. Later, you can transmit the



Reading, not writing

stored addresses—up to 300 of them—to your PC (via the included OptoLink coupler cable) to visit the pages. The pen also recognizes UPCs and other bar codes.

The pen is available at www.cross.com for \$89.99. Digital Convergence and Cross are lining up participating newspapers and retailers on a city-by-city basis; some national magazines, including Forbes and Parade, are already onboard.

If your local paper is, well, cueless, the pen still serves another function.
Buckley describes that feature in highly technical terms: 'It puts ink on paper.'

-Kevin Shay

Open, ArmaniExchange.com!

agic words have long been the means of transport to earthly delights like speakeasies, Ali Baba's cave, and discount goods online. That's right: If you know what to enter in the coupon-code field on the checkout page of many online retailers, you'll make out like a bandit.

Thankfully, you don't need to guess at an incantation, because many Web sites offer free databases of coupon codes. Take a look at dealnews coupons (coupons.dealnews.com), DailyeDeals.com (www.dailyedeals.com), Amazing-Bargains.com (www.amazing-bargains.com), eDealFinder.com (www.edealfinder.com), FatWallet.com (www.fatwallet.com), and FlamingoWorld.com (www.flamingoworld.com), and you'll find significant savings opportunities. A coupon may provide, for instance, free shipping, \$10 off a \$50

order, or 10 percent off the total.

You'll often find more than one code for each merchant. When you nail down a promotion that suits your fancy, simply copy it into the coupon-code field at checkout. Visit About.com's Couponing and Refunding page (couponing.about.com) for tips and articles on saving money both online and off. If you'll be doing your shopping offline, pay a visit to Coupons Inc. (www.coupons.com) and Eversave.com



Free money at DealFinder

(www.eversave.com), sites that specialize in printable coupons you can redeem at brick-and-mortar merchants.

-Kevin Savetz

"I opened a virus by accident."

Translation: I opened a virus like you told me not to.



How to get solutions that protect your company from problems and your co-workers from themselves.

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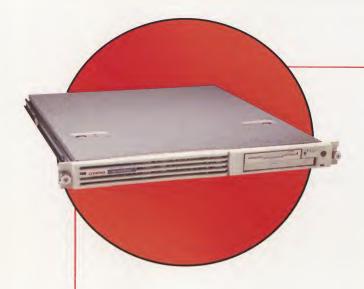






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The network ready **hp LaserJet 8150N** printer is designed to meet the complex, high-volume printing needs of growing businesses.

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hp Procurve 2524 Switch 24-port 10/100BASE-TX managed stackable switch

The **hp Procurve 2524 Switch** is a managed stackable 24-port switch with 10/100BASE-TX autosensing per port, which is ideal for low-cost migration to 10/100BASE-TX managed switching with uplinks.

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SONY 3MAX

Sony VAIO FX Series notebook¹ All-in-one convenience without all the weight

Experience Sony's 3MAX+ notebook system with powerful performance of up to a 15" active-matrix display, integrated Ethernet, and built-in DVD-ROM or CD-RW/DVD-ROM drives.

700MHz Intel® Pentium® III processor with SpeedStep™ technology

Starting at \$1696.00° CDW 265313

'FREE manufacturer wireless PC Card with the purchase of any Sony VAIO notebook, along with enrollment in GoAmerica's wireless Internet service plan for two years; restrictions apply; call your CDW account manager for details (offer ends 7/31/01)

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Simple Technology 128MB memory module For the Sony FX Series notebooks

Ensure you have the power you need before you leave the office. Enhance your performance with a 128MB Simple Technology memory upgrade.

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Sony CLIE

Personal entertainment organizer

Featuring the popular Palm OS® software, as well as utilizing Sony Memory Stick® media capabilities, the Sony CLIE handheld provides virtually unlimited storage space, plus lets you share data, play games, view digital photos and much more!

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InFocus LP350 1024 x 768 XGA projector

Whether it's ceiling-mounted or holding down the conference room table, the InFocus LP350 projector has advanced video capabilities which leave great impressions for vears to come.

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HP Vectra VL400 800MHz Intel® Pentium® III processor

With image stability, serviceability and remote management, the HP Vectra VL400 Series computer comes in three different form factors*-desktop, minitower and small form factor-allowing you to qualify only one PC, but deploy the form factor that best suits your needs.

79.39 CDW 255679

*Minitower model shown

Simple Technology 128MB memory module For HP Vectra VL400

Give your business the boost it needs to stay ahead of the competition with a 128MB Simple Technology memory module.

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Viewsonic VG175 17.4" active-matrix LCD

With 1280 x 1024 resolution, as well as a contrast ratio of 400:1, Viewsonic VG175 offers clearer, crisper and more vibrant images.

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Brother HL-1670N

With the power of a network printer, yet half the size, Brother HL-1670 **printer** is ideal for the small business which needs ultimate power and performance.

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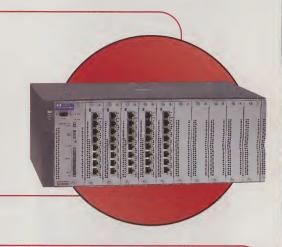
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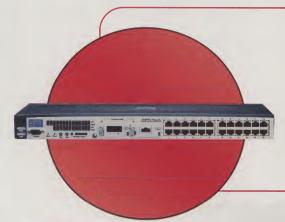
hp procurve switch 4000m

Ideal for medium to large businesses, the hp procurve switch 4000m is scalable, expandable and provides low-cost migration to 10/100/1000 switching to the desktop. It has forty 10/100 autosensing ports (expandable to 80 ports) and five open universal slots for 10/100 gigabit, 10BASE-FL or 100BASE-FX, giving you ultimate flexibility and performance.

\$1629.59* CDW 126119

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hp procurve 2524 switch 24-port 10/100BASE-TX managed switch

The **hp procurve 2524 switch** is a stackable and managed 24-port switch with 10/100BASE-TX autosensing per port. This switch offers HP Auto-MDIX on all 10/100BASE-TX and 100/1000BASE-T ports and is ideal for low-cost migration to 10/100BASE-TX managed switching with uplinks.

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loaded with the latest,
cutting-edge technology in processing for a notebook.
This new capability
increases bandwidth from
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translates into ultra-fast speed for

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ager presents the ultimate notebook for viewing and graphics, under 7.1 pounds and only 1.5" thin! The NP2850 Series offers speed and agility for handling demanding graphics applications normally found only in a desktop. With a 15.0" XGA Active Matrix Display, you can't ask for better viewing size or capability in a portable computer. As for graphics, the NP2850 Series comes complete with a 2X AGP Chipset and a 3D Graphics Accelerator for blazing speed.

np 8560 e

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- Intel® Pentium® III Processor 850MHz
- 16MB Video Memory
- 256MB 133MHz SDRAM
- 20.0GB Ultra DMA Hard Drive
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- IEEE-1394 Port
- 256KB On-Die L2 Cache
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- Built-In Touchpad Pointing Device
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- Infra Red, Wireless Fast IR Interface
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- Other Ports: 2 USB, 1S, 1P, Ext. Keyboard and Ext. CRT
- Microsoft® Windows® ME
- Deluxe Carrying Case
- Weight: 9.5 lbs with Battery
- 14.0"w x 11.0"d x 2.2"h
- Sager's Umbrella Protection Policy

np 8560 s

- 15.0" SXGA+ Active Matrix Display
- Intel® Pentium® III Processor 850MHz
- 16MB Video Memory
- 128MB 133MHz SDRAM
- 20.0GB Ultra DMA Hard Drive
- 8X Max. DVD-ROM Drive²
- Integrated 56K V90 Modem⁴ + 10/100 Ethernet
- 15-Cell 75.6w Smart Lithium-Ion Battery
- 102-Key Keyboard with Numeric Keypad
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15.0" XGA Active Matrix Display

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- 128MB 100MHz SDRAM
- 20.0GB Ultra DMA Hard Drive
- 8X Max. DVD-ROM Drive2
- Integrated 10/100 Ethernet
- Thin (1.49") and Lightweight (7.1 lbs)
- 256KB On-Die L2 Cache 2X AGP 8MB ATI Rage Pro 3D Video
- 3.5" 1.44MB Floppy Disk Drive
- 3D Surround Sound
- Smart Lithium-Ion Battery
- Built-In Touchpad Pointing Device
- 1 Type II PCMCIA Slot
- Infra Red, Wireless Fast IR Interface 2 USB Ports
- Other Ports: 1S, 1P, Ext. Keyboard and Ext. CRT
- A4 Size Windows® 95 Keyboard Microsoft® Windows® ME
- Deluxe Carrying Case
- 12.8"w x 10.51"d x 1.49"h
- Sager's Umbrella Protection Policy

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- 15.0" XGA Active Matrix Display
- Mobile Pentium® III Processor 650MHz Featuring Intel® SpeedStep™ Technology
- 128MB 100MHz SDRAM

NP5120

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- 2X AGP 8MB ATI Rage Pro 3D Video
- 3.5" 1.44MB Floppy Disk Drive
- 3D Surround Sound
- Smart Lithium-Ion Battery
- Built-In Touchpad Pointing Device
- 1 Type II PCMCIA Slot
- Infra Red, Wireless Fast IR Interface 2 USB Ports
- Other Ports: 1S, 1P, Ext. Keyboard and Ext. CRT
- A4 Size Windows® 95 Keyboard
- Microsoft® Windows® ME
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- 12.8"w x 10.51"d x 1.49"h
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15.0" SXGA+ Active Matrix Display

16MB Video Memory

IEEE-1394 Port

128MB 133MHz SDRAM

256KB On-Die L2 Cache

24X Max. CD-ROM Drive1

10.0GB Ultra DMA Hard Drive

Iomega® Zip Drive or 2nd HDD

1 TV-Out Port & 1 Video-In Port

Microsoft® Windows® ME

Deluxe Carrying Case Weight: 9.5 lbs with Battery 14.0"w x 11.0"d x 2.2"h Sager's Umbrella Protection Policy

Built-In Touchpad Pointing Device

2 Type II or 1 Type III PCMCIA Slots

Infra Red, Wireless Fast IR Interface

Other Ports: 2 USB, 1S, 1P, Ext. Keyboard

Intel® Pentium® III Processor 850MHz

Integrated 56K V90 Modem⁴ + 10/100 Ethernet

15-Cell 75.6w Smart Lithium-Ion Battery

102-Key Keyboard with Numeric Keypad

Modular 3.5" FDD exchangeable with opt.

3D Surround Sound with Hardware Wavetable

- Options
- negge Zip Drive (NP8560)
- Port Replicator
- Secondary Hard Disk Drive (NP8560)

Mobile Pentium® III Processor 800MHz

Thin (1.49") and Lightweight (7.1 lbs)

2X AGP 8MB ATI Rage Pro 3D Video

20.0GB Ultra DMA Hard Drive

3.5" 1.44MB Floppy Disk Drive

Built-In Touchpad Pointing Device

A4 Size Windows® 95 Keyboard

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Microsoft® Windows® ME

12.8"w x 10.51"d x 1.49"h

Deluxe Carrying Case

Infra Red, Wireless Fast IR Interface

Other Ports: 1S, 1P, Ext. Keyboard and Ext. CRT

Smart Lithium-Ion Battery

1 Type II PCMCIA Slot

8X Max. DVD-ROM Drive2

Integrated 10/100 Ethernet

256KB On-Die L2 Cache

3D Surround Sound

2 USB Ports

256MB SDRAM

Featuring Intel® SpeedStep® Technology



NP2250 Series

he new NP2250 Series from Sager is powerpacked and ready to perform. This leadingedge notebook features an all-in-one design including advanced features not found in many other portables. All this and more is loaded into a beautiful, silver case measuring just 1.48" high. The №2250 Series takes productivity and technology to the next level. With such a complete package, this is one solution you have to consider for any portable computing need.

- Mobile Pentium® III Processor 700MHz
- Integrated 4X AGP Graphics with 32MB Max. User Definable Share Memory Architecture
- 128MB 100MHz SDRAM
- 20.0GB Ultra DMA Hard Drive
- 8X Max. DVD-ROM Drive²
- Integrated 56K V90 Modem⁴ + 10/100 Ethernet
- 3 Hot-Keys for E-Mail, Browser and API
- 256KB On-Die L2 Cache
- 3.5" 1.44MB Floppy Disk Drive
- 3D Surround Sound
- Smart Lithium-Ion Battery
- Built-In Touchpad Pointing Device
- 1 Type II PCMCIA Slot
- Infra Red, Wireless Fast IR Interface
- 2 USB Ports
- Other Ports: 1S, 1P, Ext. Keyboard and Ext. CRT
- A4 Size Windows® 95 Keyboard
- Microsoft® Windows® ME
- Deluxe Carrying Case
- Weight: 7.0 lbs with Battery 12.1"w x 10.0"d x 1.48"h
- Sager's Umbrella Protection Policy

- 14.1" XGA Active Matrix Display Mobile Pentium® III Processor 650MHz
- Integrated 4X AGP Graphics with 32MB Max. User Definable Share Memory Architecture
- 128MB 100MHz SDRAM
- 10.0GB Ultra DMA Hard Drive
- 24X Max. CD-ROM Drive1
- Integrated 56K V90 Modem4 + 10/100 Ethernet
- 3 Hot-Keys for E-Mail, Browser and API
- 256KB On-Die L2 Cache
- 3.5" 1.44MB Floppy Disk Drive
- 3D Surround Sound
- Smart Lithium-Ion Battery
- Built-In Touchpad Pointing Device
- 1 Type II PCMCIA Slot
- Infra Red, Wireless Fast IR Interface
- 2 USB Ports
- Other Ports: 1S, 1P, Ext. Keyboard and Ext. CRT A4 Size Windows® 95 Keyboard
- Microsoft® Windows® MF
- Deluxe Carrying Case Weight: 7.0 lbs with Battery
- 12.1"w x 10.0"d x 1.48"h
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NP5120

Series

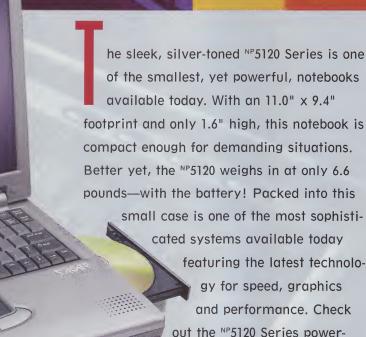
- 13.3" XGA Active Matrix Display
- Mobile Intel® Celeron™ Processor 600MHz
- Integrated 4X AGP Graphics with 32MB Max. User Definable Share Memory Architecture
- 64MB 100MHz SDRAM
- 10.0GB Ultra DMA Hard Drive
- 24X Max. CD-ROM Drive
- Integrated 56K V90 Modem4 + 10/100 Ethernet
- 3 Hot-Keys for E-Mail, Browser and API
- 128KB On-Die L2 Cache
- 3.5" 1.44MB Floppy Disk Drive
- 3D Surround Sound
- Smart Lithium-Ion Battery
- Built-In Touchpad Pointing Device
- 1 Type II PCMCIA Slot
- Infra Red, Wireless Fast IR Interface 2 USB Ports
- Other Ports: 1S, 1P, Ext. Keyboard and Ext. CRT A4 Size Windows® 95 Keyboard
- Microsoft® Windows® ME
- Deluxe Carrying Case
- Weight: 7.0 lbs with Battery
- 12.1"w x 10.0"d x 1.48"h
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12.1" SVGA Active Matrix Display Mobile Pentium® III Processor 650MHz 128MB SDRAM

10.0GB Ultra DMA Hard Drive 8X Max. DVD-ROM Drive2

Integrated 56K V90 Modem⁴ + 10/100 Ethernet The Smallest All-In-One Design

256KB On-Die L2 Cache

Integrated 4X AGP Graphics with 32MB Max. User Definable Share Memory Architecture 3.5" 1.44MB Floppy Disk Drive

3D Surround Sound

Smart Lithium-Ion Battery

Built-In Touchpad Pointing Device

1 Type II PCMCIA Slot Infra Red, Wireless Fast IR Interface

1 Kensington Lock Port

Other Ports: USB, 1S, 1P, Ext. Keyboard and Ext. CRT

Windows® 95 Keyboard

Microsoft® Windows® ME

Deluxe Carrying Case Weight: 6.6 lbs with Battery

11.0"w x 9.4"d x 1.6"h

Sager's Umbrella Protection Policy

12.1" SVGA Active Matrix Display

- Mobile Pentium® III Processor 650MHz
- 64MB SDRAM
- 6.0GB Ultra DMA Hard Drive
- 24X Max. CD-ROM Drive²
- Integrated 56K V90 Modem⁴ + 10/100 Ethernet
- The Smallest All-In-One Design
- 256KB On-Die L2 Cache
- Integrated 4X AGP Graphics with 32MB Max. User Definable Share Memory Architecture
- 3.5" 1.44MB Floppy Disk Drive
- 3D Surround Sound
- Smart Lithium-Ion Battery
- Built-In Touchpad Pointing Device
- 1 Type II PCMCIA Slot
- Infra Red, Wireless Fast IR Interface
- 1 Kensington Lock Port
- Other Ports: USB, 1S, 1P, Ext. Keyboard
- Windows® 95 Keyboard
- Microsoft® Windows® ME
- Deluxe Carrying Case
- Weight: 6.6 lbs with Battery 11.0"w x 9.4"d x 1.6"h
- Sager's Umbrella Protection Policy

\$1395

- 12.1" SVGA Active Matrix Display
- Intel® Celeron™ Processor 500MHz
- 64MB SDRAM

packed configurations.

- 6.0GB Ultra DMA Hard Drive
- 24X Max. CD-ROM Drive
- Integrated 56K V90 Modem⁴ + 10/100 Ethernet
- The Smallest All-In-One Design
- 128KB On-Die L2 Cache
- Integrated 4X AGP Graphics with 32MB Max. User Definable Share Memory Architecture
- 3.5" 1.44MB Floppy Disk Drive
- 3D Surround Sound
- Smart Lithium-Ion Battery
- Built-In Touchpad Pointing Device
- 1 Type II PCMCIA Slot
- Infra Red, Wireless Fast IR Interface
- 1 Kensington Lock Port
- Other Ports: USB, 1S, 1P, Ext. Keyboard
- Windows® 95 Keyboard
- Microsoft® Windows® ME
- Deluxe Carrying Case
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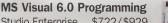


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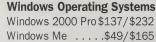
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ArialPhone

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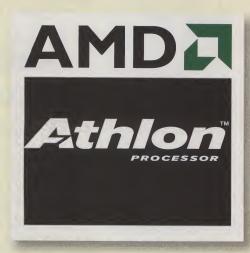
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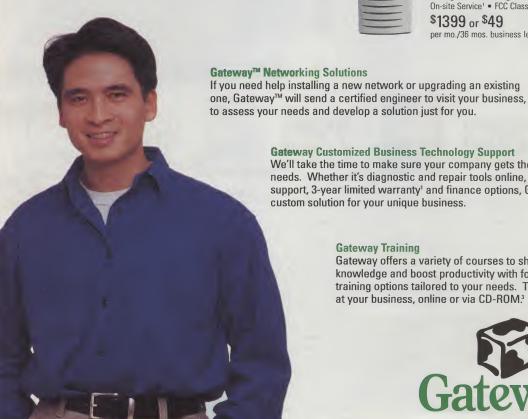
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Common Features

- > 102-key Keyboard with Numeric Keypad
- 256KB On-Die L2 Cache
- > 16MB Video Memory > 6.0GB, 10.0GB, or 20.0GB Hard Drive opt.
- > Removable 3.5" 1.44MB FDD exchangeable with opt. Iomega Zip Drive, or 2nd HDD
- > 3D Surround Sound with Hardware Wavetable
- > 2 Built-In Stereo Speakers and 1 Built-In Microphone
- > Built-In Touchpad Pointing Device > 2 Type II or 1 Type III PCMCIA Slots
- > 56K Capable³ V90 Modem
- > 75.6w Smart Lithium-Ion Battery
- > Infra Red, Wireless Fast IR Interface
- > 1 IEEE 1394 Port & 1 Video-In Port
- > 2 USB Ports & 1 TV-Out Port
- > Other Ports: 1S. 1P. Ext. Keyboard and Ext. CRT
- > Jacks: 1 Line-In, 1 Line-Out and 1 Microphone
- > Microsoft® Windows® ME
- > Carrying Case and AC Adapter

15" SXGA+ Active Matrix Display Intel® Pentium® III Processor 866MHz 128MB 133MHz SDRAM expandable to 512MB 10.0GB Hard Drive⁴ 8X' Max. DVD-ROM Drive (CD-RW opt.) \$2095

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8X' Max. DVD-ROM Drive (CD-RW opt.) \$2345



Commoo Features

- > 256KB On-Die L2 Cache
- 2X AGP 8MB ATI Rage Pro 3D Video
- > 6.0GB, 10.0GB, or 20.0GB Hard Drive opt.
- > 3.5" 1.44MB Floppy Disk Drive
- > 3D Surround Sound
- > 2 Built-In Stereo Speakers and 1 Built-In Microphone
- > Built-In Touchpad Pointing Device
- 1 Type II PCMCIA Slot
- > 10/100 Ethernet Lan Adapter
- 56K Capable³ V90 Modem
- > Smart Lithium-Ion Battery
- > Infra Red, Wireless Fast IR Interface
- > 2 USB Ports
- > Other Ports: 1S, 1P, Ext. Keyboard and Ext. CRT
- > Jacks: 1 Line-In, 1 Line-Out and 1 Microphone
- > Microsoft® Windows® ME > Carrying Case and AC Adapter
- Slim Notebook: 12.8"w x 10.15"d x 1.49"h

15" XGA Active Matrix Display Mobile Pentium® III Processor 650MHz Featuring Intel® SpeedStep™ Technology 128MB 100MHz SDRAM expandable to 512MB 24X² Max. CD-ROM Drive (8X¹ Max. DVD opt.) \$1945

15" XGA Active Matrix Display Mobile Pentium® III Processor 700MHz Featuring Intel® Speed Step™ Technology 128MB 100MHz SDRAM expandable to 512MB 20.0GB Hard Drive⁴ \$2145 8X1 Max. DVD-ROM Drive



Common Features

- > 128KB On-Die L2 Cache (Intel® Celeron™ Processor)
- 256KB On-Die L2 Cache (Intel® Pentium® III Processor)
- > Integrated 4X AGP Graphics with 32MB Max. user definable share Memory Architecture
- 6.0GB, 10.0GB, or 20.0GB Hard Drive opt.
- 3.5" 1.44MB FDD
- > 3D Surround Sound
- > 2 Built-In Stereo Speakers and 1 Built-In Microphone
- > Built-In Touchpad Pointing Device
- 1 Type II PCMCIA Slot
- 56K Capable³ V90 Modem + 10/100 Ethernet
- > Infra Red, Wireless Fast IR Interface
- > 3 Hot Keys for E-Mail, Browser and API
- > 2 USB Ports
- Other Ports: 1S, 1P, Ext. Keyboard and Ext. CRT
- > Jacks: 1 Headphone and 1 Microphone > Microsoft® Windows® ME
- Carrying Case and AC Adapter

13.3" XGA Active Matrix Display

14.1" XGA Active Matrix Display

10.0GB Hard Drive⁴

Mobile Pentium® III Processor 650MHz

8X1 Max. DVD-ROM Drive (CD-RW opt.)

Featuring Intel® Speed Step™ Technology

128MB 100MHz SDRAM expandable to 512MB

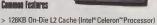
Intel® Celeron™ Processor 500MHz

64MB 100MHz SDRAM expandable to 512MB

24X2 Max. CD-ROM Drive (8X1 Max. DVD opt.) \$1345

> Slim Notebook: 12.1"w x 10.0"d x 1.48"h





- 256KB On-Die L2 Cache (Intel® Pentium® III Processor) Integrated 4X AGP Graphics with 32MB Max. user
- definable share Memory Architecture
- > 6.0GB, 10.0GB or 20.0GB Hard Drive opt.
- > 3.5" 1.44MB FDD
- > 3D Sound Effect
- > 2 Built-In Stereo Speakers and 1 Built-In Microphone
- > Built-In Touchpad Pointing Device
- 1 Type II PCMCI2A Slot
- > 10/100 Ethernet Lan Adapter
- > 56K Capable3 V90 Modem > Infra Red. Wireless Fast IR Interface
- > 1 USB Port
- Other Ports: 1S, 1P, Ext. Keyboard and Ext. CRT
- Jacks: 1 Headphone and 1 Microphone
 A4 Size 86-Key Keyboard for Easy Typing
- Microsoft® Windows® ME
- > Carrying Case and AC Adapter
- > Super Slim Notebook: 11"w x 9 4"d x 1 5"h

12.1" XGA Active Matrix Display Intel® Celeron™ Processor 500MHz 64MB 100MHz SDRAM expandable to 512MB 10.0GB Hard Drive⁴

24X² Max. CD-ROM Drive (8X¹ Max. DVD opt.) \$1245

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10.0GB Hard Drive⁴ 8X1 Max. DVD-ROM Drive (CD-RW opt.)

:1545

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Common Features

- > 256KB On-Die L2 Cache
- > Integrated 4X AGP Graphics with 32MB Max. user definable share Memory Architecture
- > 6.0GB, 10.0GB, or 20.0GB Hard Drive opt.
- > 3.5" 1.44MB FDD
- > 3D Surround Sound
- > 2 Built-In Stereo Speakers and 1 Built-In Microphone
- > Built-In Touchpad Pointing Device
- > 1 Type II PCMCIA Slot
- > 56K Capable³ V90 Modem + 10/100 Ethernet
- > Infra Red, Wireless Fast IR Interface > 3 Hot Keys for E-Mail, Browser and API
- > 1 TV-Out Port
- > 2 USB Ports & 1 IEEE 1394 Port
- > Other Ports: 1S, 1P, Ext. Keyboard and Ext. CRT
- > Jacks: 1 Headphone and 1 Microphone
- > Microsoft® Windows® ME
- > Carrying Case and AC Adapter
- > Slim Notebook: 12.1"w x 10.0"d x 1.48"h



Common Features

- > 256KB On-Die L2 Cache
- > Integrated 4X AGP Graphics with 32MB Max. user
- definable share Memory Architecture > 6.0GB, 10.0GB, or 20.0GB Hard Drive opt.
- > 3.5" 1.44MB FDD
- > 3D Surround Sound
- > 2 Built-In Stereo Speakers and 1 Built-In Microphone
- > Built-In Touchpad Pointing Device
- > 1 Type II PCMCIA Slot
- > 56K Capable³ V90 Modem + 10/100 Ethernet
- > Infra Red, Wireless Fast IR Interface > 3 Hot Keys for E-Mail, Browser and API
- > 1 TV-Out Port
- > 2 USB Ports & 1 IEEE 1394 Port > Other Ports: 1S, 1P, Ext. Keyboard and Ext. CRT > Jacks: 1 Headphone and 1 Microphone
- > Microsoft® Windows® ME
- > Carrying Case and AC Adapter
- > Slim Notebook: 12.1"w x 10.0"d x 1.48"h

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- Commoo Features > 256KB On-Die L2 Cache
- > 2X AGP 8MB ATI Rage Pro 3D Video
- > Removable 6.0GB, 10.0GB or 20.0GB Hard Drive opt.
- > Removable 3.5" 1.44MB FDD exchangeable with opt, 2nd HDD
- > 3D Surround Sound with Hardware Wavetable
- > 2 Built-In Stereo Speakers and 1 Built-In Microphone
- > Built-In Touchpad Pointing Device
- > 2 Type II or 1 Type III PCMCIA Slots which support ZV-Port and Card Bus
- > 56K Capable³ V90 Modem > Smart Lithium-Ion Battery
- > Infra Red, Wireless Fast IR Interface
- > 2 USB Ports & 1 TV-Out Port > Other Ports: 1S, 1P, Ext. Keyboard and Ext. CRT
- > Jacks: 1 Line-In, 1 Line-Out and 1 Microphone
- > Microsoft® Windows® ME
- > Carrying Case and AC Adapter
- > Slim Notebook: 12.4"w x 10.1"d x 1.4"



Common Features

- > 256KB On-Die L2 Cache
- > 2X AGP 8MB ATI Rage Pro 3D Video
- > Removable 6.0GB, 10.0GB or 20.0GB Hard Drive opt.
- > Removable 3.5" 1.44MB FDD exchangeable with opt. 2nd HDD
- > 3D Surround Sound with Hardware Wavetable
- > 2 Built-In Stereo Speakers and 1 Built-In Microphone
- > Built-In Touchpad Pointing Device > 2 Type II or 1 Type III PCMCIA Slots which support ZV-Port and Card Bus
- > 56K Capable³ V90 Modem
- > Smart Lithium-Ion Battery > Infra Red, Wireless Fast IR Interface
- > 2 USB Ports & 1 TV-Out Port
- > Other Ports: 1S, 1P, Ext. Keyboard and Ext. CRT
- > Jacks: 1 Line-In, 1 Line-Out and 1 Microphone > Microsoft® Windows® ME
- > Carrying Case and AC Adapter
- > Slim Notebook: 12.4"w x 10.1"d x 1.4"h

14.1" XGA Active Matrix Display Intel® Pentium® III Processor 933MHz 128MB 133MHz SDRAM expandable to 512MB 10.0GB Hard Drive⁴ 8X1 Max. DVD-RDM Drive (CD-RW opt.)

\$1745

13.3" XGA Active Matrix Display Intel® Pentium® III Processor 866MHz 128MB 133MHz SDRAM expandable to 512MB 10.0GB Hard Drive⁴

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Computer Shopper and ZDNet editors pick the best values among the latest tech products.

DESKTOPS

ABS AMD Web Special

Priced just under \$1,000, the ABS AMD Web Special is an incredible bargain. Not only do you get a fast 900MHz Athlon processor, 128MB of memory, and a three-piece speaker system, but its full-tower enclosure houses a speedy nVidia GeForce2 MX-based graphics card, a 16x DVD-ROM drive, and a roomy 30GB hard drive.

SEE THIS MONTH'S FEATURE ON P. 100

ABS Computer Technologies 800-876-8088 • www.buyabs.com Direct Price: \$999 34280

Compaq Presario 7000Z-1.1

At nearly \$2,400, the Presario 7000Z-1.1 clearly isn't an impulse buy. But if you're looking for a system that has every desirable feature—from a fast 1.1GHz Athlon CPU to a 756B hard drive, three IEEE 1394 ports, and a GeForce2 GTS Ultra graphics card—the 7000Z-1.1 belongs on your short list. REVIEWED IN FEBRUARY ISSUE Compaq Computer Corp. • 800-888-0220 www.compaq.com

micronpc.com Millennia Max XP

Not only is the Millennia Max XP the first computer to use DDR memory, but this fully loaded 1.2GHz Athlon PC can hold its own against 1.5GHz Pentium 4 systems in benchmark performance and features.

Just as impressive: You can purchase the Millennia Max for approximately \$1,000 less than comparable Pentium 4 rigs.

REVIEWED IN MARCH ISSUE micronpc.com • 888-224-4247

www.micronpc.com

Direct Price: \$2,699 34218

HARDWARE

ATI All-in-Wonder Radeon

Although it's priced higher than most TV-tuner cards, the All-in-Wonder Radeon is not like most TV cards. Based on ATI's acclaimed Radeon graphics chipset, the All-in-Wonder marries cutting-edge graphics performance with a personal video system capable of pausing, rewinding, and recording live TV broadcasts, and capturing and editing MPEG-2 video (and outputting it to a TV or VCR). SEE THIS MONTH'S REVIEW ON P. 65

SEE THIS MONTH'S REVIEW ON P. 65 ATI Technologies • 905-882-2600 www.ati.com

List Price: \$329.99 34256

Hercules Game Theater XP

PC audio enthusiasts can go all out with this combination sound card and outboard connector box. The sound card offers everything from 20-bit digital-to-analog conversion to support for Dolby Digital processing, EAX 2.0, and A3D 1.0. The connector box, meanwhile, boasts a full complement of input/outputs, including four USB ports, MIDI-in and -out, and digital S/PDIF inputs and outputs.

REVIEWED IN MARCH ISSUE Hercules • 877-484-5536

www.hercules.com

List Price: \$149.99 34206

Lexmark Z82 Color Jetprinter

The highest-quality output of the \$199.99 Lexmark Z82 Color Jetprinter can hold its own against that of photo printers costing nearly five times the

price. But what's even more amazing is that the Z82 is a multifunction device that also provides decent scanning and copying capabilities. A pretty picture, indeed.

SEE THIS MONTH'S FEATURE ON P. 112

Lexmark International

888-539-6275 • www.lexmark.com Mfr. Est. Price: \$199.99 34277

Seagate Barracuda ATA III ST340824A

Affordable, fast, and quiet—three adjectives that neatly sum up the new Seagate Barracuda ATA III 40GB hard



drive. In addition to zipping through the Business Disk WinMark 99 and High-End Disk WinMark 99 bench tests with scores more than 25 percent higher than average, the Barracuda incorporates a new design that keeps it running in near-absolute silence. A natural choice for disk upgrades.

SEE THIS MONTH'S REVIEW ON P. 68 Seagate Technology • 877-271-3285 www.seagate.com

Mfr. Est. Price: \$180 (34279)

Sonigistix Monsoon MM-2000 Flat Panel Surround System

The latest offering from Sonigistix furthers its reputation for building audio-phile-quality flat-panel speaker systems. The new Monsoon MM-2000 is a five-piece, four-channel setup that consists of four sexy, thin satellites and a hefty cone-driven subwoofer. Although the MM-2000 lacks Dolby Pro Logic and Dolby Digital capability, it's priced reasonably for the performance it delivers.

REVIEWED IN FEBRUARY ISSUE Sonigistix Corp. • 877-722-8346 www.monsoonaudio.com

Mfr. Est. Price: \$299 (34159)

SOFTWARE

CorelDraw 10 Graphics Suite

Both casual users and graphics professionals will enjoy working with Corel's improved graphics suite. This version includes a new vector-animation program, Corel RAVE, as well as streamlined interfaces for CorelDraw and Photo-Paint. And though the suite still can't import Flash files, CorelDraw's new Undo feature is sweet compensation.

REVIEWED IN FEBRUARY ISSUE Corel Corp. • 800-772-6735

www.corel.com

Mfr. Est. Price: \$569.99 (34132)

Microsoft Picture It Photo Premium 2001

The latest version of Microsoft's popular image-editing software combines a powerful feature set with a friendly interface that initially presents users with three simple courses of action. In addition to effortless operation, Picture It offers a wide selection of special effects and





templates that lets you customize your images to your eyes' content.
SEE THIS MONTH'S FEATURE ON P. 124
Microsoft Corp. • 800-426-9400

Microsoft Corp. • 800-426-9400 www.microsoft.com Mfr. Est. Price: \$54.95

Quicken TurboTax Deluxe

The simplicity and accuracy of TurboTax Deluxe has kept the software tops in its field for years. That winning streak continues with the 2001 edition. In addition to improving on its already easy-to-use interface and help resources, the program now lets you import W-2 and 1099 info. Unfortunately, it doesn't make it any easier to fill out the checks that might need to accompany your annual returns.

REVIEWED IN MARCH ISSUE

Intuit • 800-335-1348 www.turbotax.com

Mfr. Est. Price: \$39.95 (before \$10 rebate, valid until October) 34203



GAMES

Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2

The latest Command & Conquer title is set in an alternate reality in which the Soviet Union invades the United States following World War II. Westwood bolsters the familiar C&C elements with some brilliant new touches, including a tabbed construction bar in the interface and numerous multiplauer options. REVIEWED IN FEBRUARY ISSUE Westwood Studios • 702-228-4040 www.westwood.com Mfr. Est. Price: \$39.95 (34151)

The Longest Journey

One of the best adventure games we've seen in years, The Longest Journey combines an original story, great characters, and sumptuous graphics and settings to tell the tale of a young woman who is literally caught between two worlds. Complex yet totally engrossing, this is one journey you'll never want to end.

SEE THIS MONTH'S REVIEW ON P. 98 Funcom • www.funcom.com

Mfr. Est. Price: \$39.99

(34288)

You Don't Know Jack 5th Dementia

The latest installment in the popular gameshow-inspired PC game series features 600 new questions delivered in Jack's unique style of irreverent humor. In addition to its usual three-contestants-at-one-PC style of gameplay, 5th Dementia introduces a new



network play mode, a completely seamless link for challenging friends and strangers online. If you don't know Jack, this is a great way to make the acquaintance. REVIEWED IN MARCH ISSUE Sierra Attractions • 800-757-7707 www.ydkj.com Mfr. Est. Price: \$29.95 34229



MOBILE

Compaq iPaq H3650 Pocket PC

As capable as it is comely, the Compaq iPaq H3650 marries a fast 206MHz Intel StrongARM processor, 32MB of RAM, and a color LCD, and wraps it up in a dazzling chrome enclosure. But what makes this Pocket PC truly special is its use of plastic sleeves, called Expansion Packs, which add a CompactFlash or PC Card slot for almost unlimited connectivity options. REVIEWED IN MARCH ISSUE

Compaq Computer Corp. • 800-282-6672 www.compaq.com

Mfr. Est. Price: \$499 (34224)

Handspring Visor Platinum

It's the same size and weight as earlier Visors, but the new Visor Platinum steps up with a speedy 33MHz Motorola processor and 8MB of memory (enough for 12,000 addresses, 10 years of appointments, 6,000 to-do items, 6,000 memos, and 400 e-mail messages). It also ships with the latest Palm OS, all the standard Palm apps, and a cradle that uses a USB connection. A smart choice, hands down.

REVIEWED IN MARCH ISSUE Handspring • 888-565-9393 www.handspring.com Mfr. Est. Price: \$299 (34223)

HP Omnibook 500

As seductively stylish as it is versatile, the HP Omnibook 500 shifts easily between a fully equipped desktop replacement and slight 3.7-pound ultraportable. For \$3,039, the Omnibook packs a speedy 600MHz Pentium III processor, 128MB of SDRAM, a roomy 20GB hard drive, and top-drawer battery performance into a sleek titanium case that'll satisfy even the most discriminating executives.

SEE THIS MONTH'S REVIEW ON P. 84 Hewlett-Packard Co. • 800-752-0900 www.hp.com Mfr. Est. Price: \$3,039 834274

HP Pavilion N5190

With its stylish design, excellent feature set, and good application performance, the HP Pavilion N5190 is a great choice in a

midrange consumer notebook, At 7.2 pounds, this 700MHz Pentium III-based system is no featherweight. It's packed with cool features, including a DVD drive, dedicated audio-CD controls, and a wide, comfortable keyboard. You can take it with you, after all.

REVIEWED IN FEBRUARY ISSUE Hewlett-Packard Co. • 800-752-0900 www.hp.com

Mfr. Est. Price: \$2,399 (34120)

Pacific Neo-Tek OmniRemote

Are remote-control devices mysteriously proliferating in your family room? If so, consider the Pacific Neo-Tek OmniRemote. You can transform your Handspring Visor into a fully programmable and highly capable universal remote for a television, cable box, VCR, audio equipment—up to 15 devices in all.

REVIEWED IN FEBRUARY ISSUE Pacific Neo-Tek • www.pacificneotek.com Mfr. Est. Price: \$59.95 34124

Palm VIIx

Mobile executives are bound to turn some heads with the stylish Palm VIIx. But the real eye-opener is its wireless access to the Internet and clever Palm Query Apps (PQAs), hundreds of tiny Web-clipping



applets that display dynamic or static data from a wide range of sites. The only downside: You pay a premium price for the monthlu wireless service. REVIEWED IN MARCH ISSUE

Palm • 800-881-7256 • www.palm.com Mfr. Est. Price: \$449 34227

WEB SERVICES

Snapfish

For \$1.69 per roll, Snapfish will develop your 35mm film, send you back your prints on high-quality paper, and post your images online. The service even sends you postage-paid mailers and accepts disposable cameras. Photo cards, frames, and reprints are available, as are online albums. The catch? You have to view your snapshots on the Snapfish Web site within 30 days, but that seems reasonable to us REVIEWED IN FEBRUARY ISSUE Snapfish • 415-820-3888



Direct Price: \$1.69 per roll (up to 24 rolls

per year) (34152)





When Governments Get Greedy

Costly auctions of the radio spectrum could cripple 3G wireless.

ESPITE HIGH CONSUMER INTEREST, LIMITATIONS IN TODAY'S wireless devices are hindering the market. And thanks to government efforts to cash in on the next-generation standard, things won't improve soon.

Because the third-generation (3G) wireless standard requires new radio frequencies, governments decided to auction them off. Early efforts were astonishingly successful, with 3G auctions last summer netting \$50 billion in Germany and \$35 billion in the United Kingdom.

But the telcoms apparently awoke to the fact that on top of the auctions, 3G requires expensive upgrades for new equipment, infrastructure, and applications. The projected outlays were so great that payback receded ever further into the future.

As a result, the auction process is com-

ing apart at the seams. Two large telcoms recently backed out of bidding in France, saying the \$4.5 billion asking price was too high. In Spain, legal actions have challenged the bidding, as well as proposed annual fees for use of the spectrum. Despite earlier announcements touting 3G infrastructure in Spain, handset manufacturers for 3G haven't appeared, making it unlikely that a previously announced 3G rollout will occur this August.

In the United States, auctions have netted \$17 billion so far, but Verizon Wireless and others recently succeeded in getting the FCC to delay further bidding from March to September 2001,

the fourth such postponement. Because of the uncertainties, there's a growing chance that 3G will appear with gaps in coverage and incompatible standards, especially in Europe. This is the opposite of the original goal of having 3G provide seamless high-bandwidth services, including multimedia, interactive

games, wireless browsing, mobile commerce, and improved messaging.

BLAME AROUND

Of course, governments don't deserve all the blame. Some analysts have even suggested that the auction pullbacks are merely a



ploy to get prices lowered for the spectrum. Yet with stakes so huge, competitors have shown little patience for the big picture. On the contrary, telcoms are forging ahead with unique versions of 3G, rather than working

toward a unified standard. The situation in Europe may defeat all but the very largest telcoms. A December 2000 report by Forrester Research estimates that profitability on mobile phones will fall to zero by 2007, eliminating all but five players by 2008.

Of course, here in the United States, there's always enough blame to share with the government: Not only did the FCC again postpone the wireless auctions, it's permitting strange ground rules. Spectrum to be auctioned for 3G devices is currently occupied by TV channels 60 to 69. Eventually, these will be abandoned as broadcasters shift to digital television, but that day itself is receding, given the glacial adoption rate for high-definition television.

For now, the FCC won't force broadcasters to give up spectrum (perish the thought). Instead, winners of the 3G auction must "encourage" broadcasters to move to other frequencies. Nice. The upshot will likely be that 3G "winners" have to pay extra to get the broadcasters to move.

IN THE MEANTIME

Given 3G uncertainties, wireless companies can hardly be blamed for trying to advance existing standards. As I noted last month, the 2.5G initiative is gaining support. Based on the existing WAP cellular standard, 2.5G can be implemented far more cheaply than 3G.

In addition, U.S. customers will get a shot at the i-mode standard first introduced in Japan by NTT DoCoMo. So there are plenty of improvements short of 3G. The downside is that these efforts add to wireless complexity and use resources that could otherwise help the

move to 3G. Though 3G is delayed, it will happen. Existing infrastructure can never handle the advanced capabilities consumers will eventually demand. Despite the obvious drawbacks of small screens and tiny keyboards, interest in wireless phones and PDAs is rising. With computers and Internet access pretty much a given,

the most rapid growth in capabilities will occur among these small

mobile devices. With such products poised for rapid evolution in coming years, it's interesting how little consensus exists about how they will

differ from today's cell phones and PDAs. john_blackford@zdnet.com





Swan Song For Snapshots

Digital photography needs just a few more advancements to kill off film.

F ALL THE PERIPHERAL TECHNOLOGIES LATCHED TO THE computer, nothing has been more interesting than digital photography. Today's 3.3-megapixel cameras produce fabulous photographs, and pros and amateurs alike are flocking to them.

There's not even a remote notion that film will continue to exist in anything other than specialized high-end applications such as long-exposure or large-format images. And digital sensors could replace even those uses.

That said, I have two concerns about the technology. The first is where it will end. When do we stop improving cameras to the extreme and settle in? Then there's the sociology of the camera and how we deal with pictures.

Let's look at my first concern. Of all the semiconductor technologies, none approaches the point of "impractical improvement" as quickly as digital photography. And this point draws near. By "impractical" I mean beyond the limits of usefulness: At what point do you not need to improve the technology? The word in photography circles is once you reach 8-megapixel resolution you achieve the equivalent of the best 35mm film images. After that you get into 4x5 and 8x10 resolution, a predominantly professional or fine-arts market niche just as well served by film.

GOOD-BYE AND GOOD RIDDANCE

I'm eager to watch film's demise. It isn't dead yet, but it will be within the next decade. Even now, there are only a few purposes for which film can't be replaced by its digital equivalent: for niche and antique camera use, and in disposable cameras.

The latter was a marketing tour de force, keeping film alive longer than anyone would have imagined. Invented to take advantage of those who need a camera in a pinch, disposables take decent pictures despite their plastic lenses and shutters. But eventually,

the emergence of the disposable digital camera will supplant them. Once this becomes practical, film will be officially dead.

Disposable digital cameras' off-the-shelf subsystems are almost together. They'll consist of the same cheap plastic body, short-use flash, battery, and plastic lens used in dispos-



able film cameras. But a cheap CMOS sensor and the already available write-once flash RAM will replace the film mechanism. A support chip will fire up the CMOS chip, adjust the image, and load it on the flash memory while maintaining a file system for the pictures.

Before digital-camera subsystems can

kill off film, though, they have to drop below the price of a canister of film. This means the sensor and support chips must cost less than a dollar. It will be years before such a camera can even be contemplated, because the price curves as determined by Moore's Law don't show the combination of memory cost, CMOS, and support circuits dropping to this level for two or three 18-month cycles.

THE SOCIOLOGY OF SNAPSHOTS

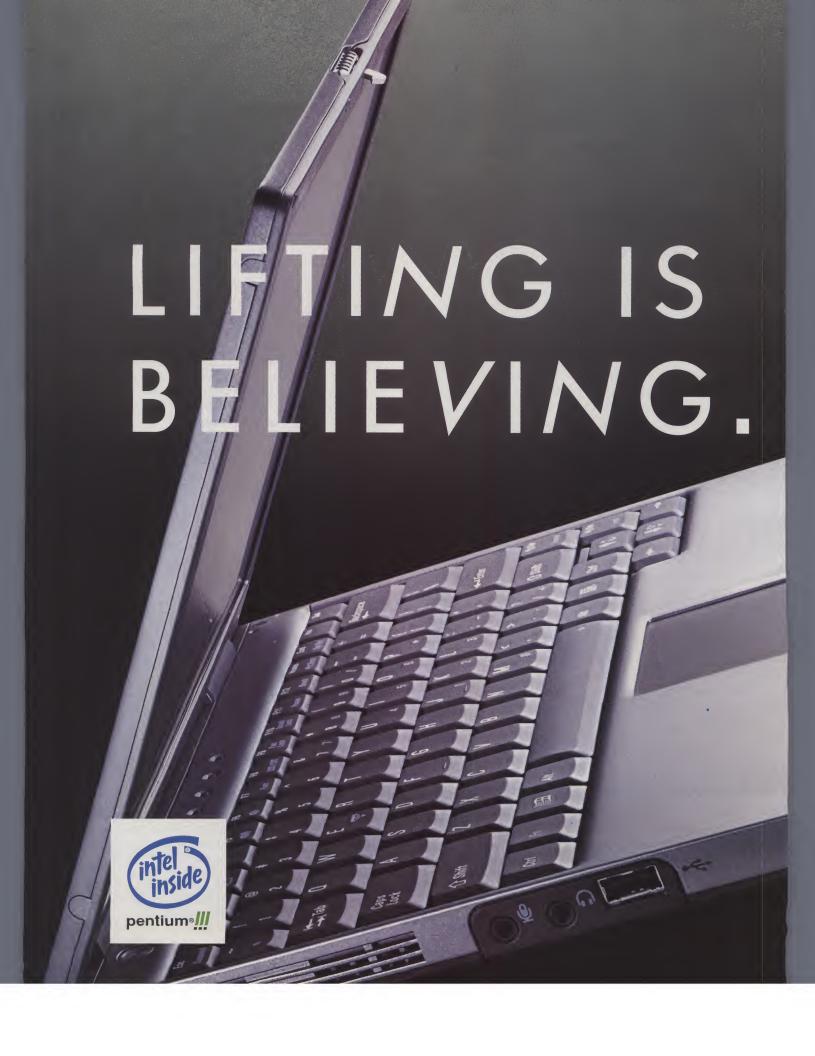
This brings me to the issue of the sociology of photography. Digital cameras are also responsible for the resurgence of photography as a hobby, with the "digital darkroom" emerging as a fun tool. But the film camera won't die off as long as snapshots are a way of life. By that I mean the concept of taking a bunch of pictures and getting a handful of prints you can pass around the office or among friends. It's a social exercise that hasn't been fully replaced by digital photography, and its importance can't be underestimated. I know people who say they love digital photography but are irked that there are no prints to pass around.

People like handling prints. They like sorting through them. They like looking at other people's snapshots and wondering, "Who's that guy she's with?" This sociology is completely lost with digital photography.

Manufacturers have produced perforated paper that lets users print six snapshots on a page. But, as anyone who does digital photography knows, this is an exercise in futility. Nobody takes 50 pictures with a digital camera, then wastes money printing them all out as snapshots. Besides, there's no easy way to do this. You have to do a lengthy setup and edit, and go through a rigmarole to print the shots. It's a lot of work.

The snapshot exercise will eventually die off, just as the family slide show did. Who buys slide projectors nowadays? But what will replace the snapshot pile? People can visit a photo-sharing Web page, but that's a solitary experience. The only possible substitute that fulfills the needed sociology is the handheld viewer. This could be in the form of a Palm unit or a dedicated device similar to an e-book reader. The company that makes a transparent system that can move images to a typical pocket computer without a hassle will do well in this emerging market. Adding functionality such as the ability to e-mail pictures to and from these viewers will make it that much more attractive. That's the future of snapshot photography.

dvorak@dvorak.org





Dell™ Rated #1 in Notebook Satisfaction, 10th Consecutive Quarter Technology Business Research Corporate IT Buying Behavior and Customer Satisfaction Study. - 3rd Quarter 2000, December 14, 2000

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Virtual Books Hit the Shelves

Can e-books revive the lost art of pleasure reading?

UTHOR SETH GODIN BROUGHT THE NAPSTER CONCEPT TO the world of e-books last summer when he gave away his latest work online. He offered the book, Unleashing the Ideavirus (Do You Zoom, 2000), in multiple formats and instructed recipients how to pass it along to friends. When the print version came out in the fall, he says, he sold far more copies than he would have had he sold it solely through traditional channels.

In a move equally scary for print publishers, Stephen King produced The Plant in serial form, and offered it for download for a voluntary fee of \$1 to \$2 per installment. But he put the work on hiatus in late 2000 after payments dropped to 42 percent of those who downloaded it, leading the press, which originally viewed this as a death knell for traditional publishers, to pronounce e-books dead on arrival.

E-book publishers have some work to do to prove them wrong. First, they have to stop obsessing over copyright protection and royalties—what publishers and authors want—and start focusing on what consumers want. They need to lift the unnecessary restrictions on e-book readers concerning printing, cutting, pasting, and sharing. Book buyers are older and busier than the teens and college students the music industry targets, so Napster-style piracy isn't a problem.

Helping this mature demographic enjoy reading despite their busy schedules should be the real goal of e-book publishers, device and software makers, and e-tailers, notes R. Micheal Segroves, vice president of marketing and sales for peanutpress.com. The company focuses exclusively on e-books for PDAs running the Palm OS or Windows CE, which has its own reader. Downloading a 200K e-book takes just a few seconds. Although these devices' screens are small, the format is conducive to the quick break in the doctor's office or on the train.

READ ON

E-book content is becoming more widely available as publishers from Random House (AtRandom.com) to AOL Time Warner (iPublish.com, scheduled to launch this quarter) ramp up their offerings. These publishers are even exploring works from unknown authors.

Startup MightyWords recently began publishing the works of more popular authors such as Toni Morrison and Patricia Cornwell after scrapping its self-publishing concept. The publisher still occupies an interesting niche, however, with essays and novels of 10



to 100 pages—short enough for even the most harried readers, and in some cases, too esoteric to have been published elsewhere.

Barnes & Noble.com, which sells e-books in the Microsoft Reader, Adobe Acrobat eBook Reader, and Gemstar formats (the last for RCA's \$299 REB1100 and \$699 color REB1200), launched its own imprint called Barnes & Noble Digital in January. Its e-books will fall in the \$5.95 to \$7.95 range.

Authors, too, are showing a willingness to experiment. In January, Dean Koontz agreed to publish his next work through Barnes & Noble Digital, and crime author Elmore Leonard said he would release his next book through another Internet imprint, Contentville. In addition, Frederick Forsyth will take Stephen King's serial approach, albeit with copyright protection, through Online Originals.

INCUBATION PERIOD

Lower-cost e-book hardware devices with PIM-like features and audio-book players should help spread the word(s). Pricing for Franklin Electronic Publishers' eBookMan, scheduled to ship before winter's end, will start at only \$129.95.

Academics and researchers could also boost the e-book business, because it relieves them of weighty textbooks. Features such as annotation, highlights, bookmarks, and dictionaries are already making their way into PDA- and PC-based readers, as well as dedi-

The increased availability of content, lower costs, and the instant gratification of downloading without shipping costs could be as revolutionary as the mass-market business itself, says Michael Fragnito, vice president of digital books and publisher of Barnes & Noble Digital. "There was a time when it was unheard of to be able to buy books everywhere-in the drugstore and at the airport," he says. Now imagine beaming books from the plane or at the terminal.

Audio books took a while to catch on, too, notes Fragnito. "But after they were marketed correctly, they grew to serve a large group of people who spend a lot of time in their cars," he says. "And they didn't cannibalize book sales." Indeed, part of Barnes & Noble Digital's plan is to target the 90 to 95 percent of the population that doesn't buy a single print book in a given year.

Stephen King's response to a recent New York Times editorial indicates he concurs. People keep telling him, he said in his reply, they're waiting for the print version. "They're like people saying, 'I love corn on the cob, but creamed corn makes me gag." King sees separate audiences for the formats and doesn't believe the \$600,000 grossed online will eat into print sales. If Godin's experience with Unleashing the Ideavirus is any indication, sales could actually be higher.

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The Internet Is Alive and, Well...

Say good-bye to Web freebies—or say good-bye to the Web.

OT LONG AGO, THE INTERNET WAS BEING HAILED AS THE most important advance since the printing press. Startups were being funded at an astounding pace, companies were going public early in their lives with no profits, and young companies were being valued at many billions of dollars.

Today, getting venture capital for a consumer Internet company is next to impossible, interest in initial public offerings has dried up, and companies that once traded at more than \$100 per share are selling in single digits.

The picture isn't much rosier for Internet-access devices. Pioneering Webappliance vendor Netpliance dropped out of the hardware business and stopped selling to consumers; Virgin Interactive abandoned its program to provide customers with Web terminals; and the heavily discussed Web tablets have hardly made an appearance. In the software realm, the much-anticipated explosion of Java that was supposed to result in independence from the PC standard has been a dud.

Were we all wrong to think the Internet was such an important change? Not at all. But in the enthusiasm surrounding the Internet, companies and investors both public and private lost track of basic business principles, and confused the frenetic pace of software revisions and growth in Internet usage with a fast pace of consumer change. As for the PC, it's shown remarkable vigor, repelling all attempts to establish platform-independent standards (more on this topic next month).

There's no question the Internet represents an enormous shift in the business and technology landscape. But no matter how momentous its effect may be, acquiring a loyal customer base takes time, and running a business that delivers physical products is complex and challenging, whether orders are taken over the Internet or over the phone.

Much of the money spent over the past few years on Internet startups was squandered on marketing, as companies tried to

build leading brands quickly. "Get big fast" was the almost universally accepted mantra for creating a successful Internet company. Great brands, however, are earned, not bought. It takes time for people to gain experience with a company, understand and believe in the values of the brand, and accept it as part of their personal landscape.



No matter how fast a company spends its marketing dollars, people change their habits and attitudes only at a certain rate.

One widely used technique Internet

companies employed to build a large "customer" base quickly was to give things away-from e-mail access to Internet service to computers—with the intent of making money from them later. Unfortunately, "customers" who accept things for nothing don't necessarily have any desire to spend money. Consumers have been spoiled. Internet startups have trained them to expect things for free that can only be provided without cost when they're subsidized by venture capital. Web advertising doesn't work very well, and it certainly doesn't generate enough revenue to support an entire enterprise-or to make it affordable to give away hardware.

In the past year, venture capitalists have stopped funding businesses that have no clear prospects for getting paid for their products and services. The inability to raise successive rounds of funding has led directly to the demise of many Internet companies in the past year, and many more will fall in the coming year. A few will survive by charging for things that were free last year.

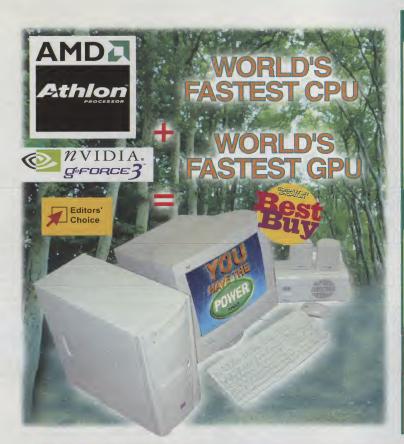
The collapse of stock prices has created a feeling of failure that's even more widespread. Inflated stock prices had nothing to do with real company values; they were merely a symptom of an investing public that had bought into the idea of the Internet as a huge business opportunity. This created far more demand for Internet stocks than there was supply. As in any severe supply/demand imbalance, prices were bid up to outrageous levels. Analogies to the famous tulip craze of the 17th century are entirely apt.

The venture-capital community, while realizing stock prices were unsupportable, nevertheless profited tremendously from shifting the risk of immature Internet businesses onto the retail investor. Now that the public has stopped playing the game and stock prices have collapsed, the investment community is in a deep funk.

Today, it's difficult for businesses that serve consumers to raise money. Investors have overreacted to their previous excesses, and most now avoid anything that serves consumers direct-

ly. Once the unsupportable free services die off, it will again be possible to create businesses that deliver real value for which consumers will pay, and that will be funded and grown at a sustainable pace. Ultimately, this will be good for consumers. The Web is a wonderful thing, but it needs to be on solid financial footing.

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VS8000

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HILE YOU'VE PROBABLY READ QUITE A BIT ABOUT DELL'S DIMENSION series of desktop computers, Dell sells three times as many of its shy family cousin, the OptiPlex line. Far from the gamers and the family-entertainment PCs, OptiPlex systems are built for business: There's nary a hint of mirth. The OptiPlex GX150, built on Intel's 815E chipset, fits that description to a T.

OptiPlex computers are available with either Celeron or Pentium III processors. Our charcoal-gray \$1,409 system packed an 866MHz Pentium III with 128MB of SDRAM, a 20GB hard drive, and a 17-inch monitor, resulting in a feature and performance middleweight.

The condensed-height desktop form factor was developed over a decade ago, but Dell

new twist with its 4x15x16.5inch desktop enclosure. The front is hinged, and depressing buttons at either side of the back of the case lets you raise the lid. The drives are housed in the upper section, while the electron-

ics remain



underneath. Like the case, everything on the inside is tool-free. There's a hatch on the front that hides two of the four USB ports and a second headphone jack.

There are some expansion opportunities here, but not many. For example, the GX150 doesn't have any available drive bays, although it does come with two horizontally oriented PCI slots above the power supply. But the minimal expansion demands of most business users can probably be accommodated through the PCI slots, USB ports, or as a shared resource over the network.

The OptiPlex GX150 displayed strong performance on Business Winstone 2001, which runs a suite of bread-and-butter business applications, but it didn't quite measure up to the level of performance we saw with the similarly configured micronpc. com ClientPro CN. Its pace through Content Creation Winstone 2001, using a

somewhat more robust suite of applications with the Web-site-content creator in mind, was more in line with the ClientPro's performance.

To push the GX150 into the midrange, Dell bypassed the chipset's embedded video and installed an nVidia TNT2 Pro AGP graphics card with 16MB onboard. That's a reasonable amount of graphics memory for a business computer, and the card delivers acceptable 2D and 3D graphics performance. Dell also dropped in a 7,200-rpm 20GB Maxtor Ultra ATA/100 drive for topof-the-line disk performance. If your applications are installed on the server rather than locally, 20GB is perfectly acceptable.

Dell made an interesting compromise on the GX150's monitor. The company offers a variety of displays, ranging from 15 to 21 inches (including several flat panels). This system was configured with an E771p 17inch model offering a 0.27mm dot pitch and a 16-inch viewing area. The E series is Dell's cost-conscious value line. It lacks the Trinitron tube and the low dot pitch of the higher-cost moders, but it does just fine with a 1,024x768 resolution at 85Hz, and adds less than \$80 to the configuration over a 15-inch display.

When the work is done, you can kick off your shoes and lean back in your chair—but not too far. Like

other business PCs, the GX150 is entertainmentchallenged. It doesn't have a DVD or CD-RW drive, only a 48x CD-ROM

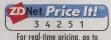
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drive connected to an embedded Sound Blaster-compatible audio system. However, you're limited to a single line-in, line-out, and microphone jack, so you can forget about a cubicle filled with surround sound, even though the Harman Kardon HK695 speaker system can be used in a multiple-speaker setup. What you will hear is reasonably good audio,

up to three-quarters volume, from a 28-watt subwoofer and a pair of 6-watt satellites that look more like champagne flutes than speakers. There's no modem, but 10/100Mbps Ethernet is integrated on the motherboard, and most business users access the Internet over their network anyway.

Dell provides toll-free hardware support for the life of the system, 24 hours a day. A "getting started" hotline for applicationand communications-software installation questions is available during the first 30 days. Optional operating-system and application support plans are available. The GX150 carries a three-year parts-and-labor warranty with next-business-day, onsite coverage. Optional extended plans offer up to five years of coverage.

The OptiPlex GX150 isn't for the kids. But it works well for grown-ups, and Dell has priced it right.

-Bill O'Brien





Ever wonder why some people always seem to have the edge on their competition? Is it luck, hard work, or perhaps their hardware? At Fujitsu PC Corporation, we know what

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When you travel for business, do you ever ask yourself, am I winning or losing?

LifeBook™ B Series notebook weighs less than 3 pounds. Yet it includes such features as a 10.4" touch screen display, built-in modem and Ethernet LAN, and pre-boot security options all wrapped up in an elegant magnesium alloy casing. With our LifeBook B Series notebook, you'll have the answers you need. You'll win!

The LifeBook B Series is powered by a low-voltage Intel® Celeron™ processor 500MHz.

Fujitsu recommends Windows® 2000 Professional for business.





THE POSSIBILITIES ARE INFINITE

DESKTOPS

HP PAVILION 9800

Beauty and Brawn At a Modest Price

OSS ANOTHER HAT INTO THE FAST-AND-AFFORDABLE-PC-FOR-ALLoccasions ring-Hewlett-Packard's. The new HP Pavilion 9800 puts 1GHz Pentium III muscle and a big box of hard-working, fun-loving computing amenities in your home or office.

In fact, about the only thing the \$1,800 Pavilion 9800 lacks is an IEEE 1394 (FireWire) port. A 1GHz processor and a 60GB ATA/100 hard drive is a recipe for toying with digital video, but you can't do it right without a faster interface than USB. Most able digitalvideo devices use IEEE 1394 for connecting both to the PC and to home-entertainment devices. The 9800 does have four USB ports, but the spare serial port parked next to the

two front-mounted USB ports is no substitute for 1394.

The missing interface is one of this PC's few shortcomings. The 9800's 12x DVD drive, 17-inch monitor (with a 15.8-inch viewing area), Sound Blaster Live Value card, Polk five-piece surround speakers, and WinDVD playback software add up to great personal theater, though the bundle doesn't quite cut it as a group entertainment center. The V70 monitor is a little small for the whole family

to gather around, and the picture quality is only average. Also, text blurs slightly near the corners of the screen. Still, it offers a top resolution of 1,280x1,024 and a fine dot pitch of 0.27mm.

The Polk speaker system won't rattle your windows with its 40-watt output, but it will suffice for most uses short of headbanging rock and roll. We had to perform the final setup ourselves on the Sound Blaster Live software to make the environmental sound available to the speakers, but once we did, watching X-Men at half volume with concert-hall effects on was a profound experience. You can get really visceral effects from audio CDs as well, whether commercial ones or homeburned discs created with the 8x/4x/32x



HP CD-Writer Plus drive.

Be sure to add a joystick to the package, because the nVidia GeForce2 GTS card, bolstered by 32MB of DDR SDRAM, is very 3D-game-friendly. And when you really need to get to work, you can roll out the provided Microsoft Office 2000 Small Business suite.

The 1GHz Pentium III-which performs average for its class, admittedly a very fast class—is more than adequate for everyday productivity apps, and with 60GB of hard drive space available, you can store thousands of MP3 files without resorting to the CD-RW drive. The system arrived with 128MB of PC133 SDRAM, expandable to 512MB.

The 9800 is a big system—19.5x6.5x19.5

inches—yet it doesn't have many expansion options apart from the USB ports. No internal drive bays are free, and of the five front-accessible bays, only two are vacant. Getting inside the case is a matter of two thumbscrews; you're rewarded with just one empty PCI slot to fill, however. A huge chunk of internal space is occupied by a clear plastic duct that tops

the CPU. The duct's air flow is intended to keep the Pentium III processor cool, venting through an unused auxiliary fan grille. Keep a screwdriver handy if you're planning to work inside

EDITORS' RATING 7.0 RATED I TO 10 DESIGN. EASE OF USE PERFORMANCE SERVICE AND SUPPORT VALUE Fast 60GB hard drive; nVidia GeForce2 gaming power; good five-piece speaker system No IEEE 1394 (FireWire) interface; unnecessary full-

size tower case; only one empty PCI SYSTEM: HP Pavilion 9800 COMPANY:

Hewlett-Packard Co.

Cupertino, CA; 888-999-4747 www.hp.com AS TESTED: 1GHz Pentium III; 128MB PC133 SDRAM; 60GB Ultra ATA/100 hard drive; 8x/4x/32x CD-RW drive; 12x DVD drive; nVidia GeForce2 GTS graphics card with 32MB DDR SDRAM; 17-inch HP V70 monitor; Sound Blaster Live Value card; Polk Audio AMR90 five-piece speaker system with subwoofer; Lucent V.90 WinModem; 10/100Mbps Fast Ethernet card; Windows Me; Microsoft Office 2000 Small Business DIRECT PRICE: \$1,800



For real-time pricing, go to priceit.zdnet.com and enter number

the case, because the thumbscrews are the only tool-free part of this system.

One nice touch is the compartment on top for storing emergency disks. And the keyboard provides controls for playing CDs and DVDs, with HP's now-signature glowing blue halos around the Internet shortcut keys.

HP's Pavilion series comes with a one-year carry-in warranty on parts and labor. That's a reasonable

arrangement if you've purchased the system locally, but it's less accommodating if you've bought online. You can bump the coverage up to three years for \$99, or jump into the lap of luxury with three years of onsite service for \$169. Support is available 24 hours a day, although it's not a toll-free call.

We really do miss the 1394 interface in this PC, and believe that its large case merits more available PCI slots. Integrating more components on the motherboard—such as the 10/100Mbps Ethernet—would help HP accomplish this second goal. Still, the Pavilion 9800 is an able, affordable PC that can tackle almost anything you can throw at it.

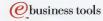
-Bill O'Brien

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Microsoft Office 2000 Small Business⁵ (Part #19K4290) Lotus® SmartSuite® Millennium Edition

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(Part #02K8667) \$149 or \$5/month

ThinkPad Dock (Part #263110U) \$499 or \$18/month



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compatible phone line and server equipment, and transmitting at up to 31.2Kbps. Public networks currently limit maximum download speeds to about 53Kbps. Actual speeds depend on many factors and are often less than the maximum possible. *Includes battery and optional travel bezel instead of standard optical drive in Ultrabay 2000, if applicable; weight may vary due to vendor components, manufacturing process and options. "The IBM Comput-Plus Carrying Case is distributed and sold by Betesh/Motion Systems and the ThinkPad T21 Carrying Case by Port/Targus. IBM, the IBM logo and IBM trade dress are owned by International Business Machines Corporation and are used under license from IBM. IBM does not manufacture these products and provides no warranty or support for these products. Please contact Betesh/Motion Systems or Port/Targus with any representation of the support of the suppor independent verification by ZD; ZD makes no representations or warranties as to these test results. BatteryNark™ is a trademark of ZD Inc. in the US and other countries. A description of the environment under which the test was performed is available at ibm.com/pc/ww/thinkpad/batterylife.html Battery life (and recharge times) will vary based on many factors including screen brightness, applications, features, power management, battery conditioning and other customer preferences. "Titanium Composite Carbon Fiber Reinforced Plastic has three times the strength of ABS plastic as tested by IBM using the high flex modulus test on 2/28/00. Available on select models. IBM reserves the right to alter product offerings and specifications at any time, without notice. SuccessLease and all IBM product names are registered trademarks of International Business Machines Corporation. Lotus and SmartSuite are registered trademarks of Lotus Development Corporation, an IBM company. Intel, the Intel Inside logo and Pentium are registered trademarks and Celeron and SpeedStep are trademarks of Intel Corporation. Microsoft and Windows are registered trademarks of Microsoft Corporation. Other company, product and service names may be trademarks or service marks of others. ©2001 IBM Corp. All rights reserved. HARDWARE

A Solid Solution For Serious Storage

ANASONIC'S \$490 LF-D201U DVD-RAM DRIVE TAKES us where no removable-media drive has taken us before: It can hold most of our hard drive's contents on a single disc, and it's as easy to use as a floppy drive.

The LF-D201U is the next generation of rewritable DVD-RAM drives, able to use the new double-sided 9.4GB discs (4.7GB per side), in addition to older DVD-RAM media. The drive also reads any other CD or DVD media, and stacks up well against CD-RW drives with its rated read speed of 24x for CDs.

We tested the SCSI version of the drive. Under Windows 2000,



the drive copied a single 81.9MB file from a CD to a hard drive in 35 seconds. We also copied a folder that contained 355 files in 60 folders, with a total of 80MB of data; the drive copied the folder in 78 seconds.

Writing data to a DVD-RAM disc was also fast, though not as fast as Panasonic's rating of 2.8MB/sec for 4.7GB DVD-RAM media. The single 81.9MB file transferred in 67 seconds, for a transfer rate of about 1.3MB/sec.

Installation and setup were simple. The drive offers internal termination set by a jumper, and the affixed label clearly marks the SCSI ID and termination positions. Panasonic

> includes drivers for Windows 95, 98, NT, 2000, and Me.

Under Windows, the unit appears as two separate drives, one for

read-only media, the other for DVD-RAM. The bundle includes one 4.7GB disc and software that automatically backs up critical files and folders. Another utility lets you copy DVD-RAM discs using a single drive, buffering the data on your hard drive.

If you're looking for one drive that can do it all-back up data, record video, and play CDs and DVD movies—the LF-D201U is it.

-Alfred Poor

EDITORS' RATING 7.6

RATED I TO 10

Strong 3D; fast DDR memory; DVI output built in; time

Can't add memory modu Windows NT users can't use multimedia features; no

PRODUCT: ATI All-in-Wonder Radeon

shifting; excellent TV and video tools

Can't add memory modules;

SETUP AND CONTROLS . 2D PERFORMANCE

3D PERFORMANCE VALUE .

FEATURES

EDITORS' RATING 8.0

RATED I TO 10

Works with CD and DVD discs; easy to install and

operate; inexpensive discs; huge

DVD-RAM not yet widely adopted; slower and more expensive than a second hard drive

800-742-8086, 201-348-7000

www.panasonic.com/storage MFR. EST. PRICE: \$490

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3 4 2 7 2

PRODUCT: Panasonic

LF-D201U DVD-RAM Drive COMPANY: Panasonic

FEATURES

VALUE

INSTALLATION.

canacity: rewritable

ATI ALL-IN-WONDER RADEON

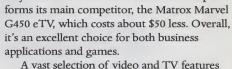
All Is Wonderful For PC-TV Fans

RADEON-BASED CARDS FROM ATI TECHNOLOgies have received enthusiastic reviews since their debut, so it makes sense that the company would design its latest All-in-Wonder multifunction video card around Radeon technology. In doing so, ATI has answered many of

the criticisms leveled at earlier All-in-Wonder cards, which offered excellent features but sometimes less-than-optimal video perfor-

mance, especially in 3D.

The latest All-in-Wonder card uses DDR memory and features the same Radeon graphics processor found on the Radeon 64MB DDR card, which provides competitive 3D features and performance. By our 3D-performance measures, the All-in-Wonder outpaces all others except 64MB nVidia GeForce Ultra-based boards. In addition, speed for general applications is more than satisfac-



makes the All-in-Wonder Radeon versatile, too. Its 125-channel stereo tuner comes with the Guide Plus+ program guide. You can output TV and DVD video to a TV set, and the board comes equipped with support for digital flatpanel monitors. The card also supports digitalaudio output via S/PDIF connectors. You can record video directly to your hard drive, and video-editing software (with support for DV

Like the Matrox Marvel G450 eTV, and personal video recorders such as TiVo and ReplayTV, the All-

in-Wonder Radeon provides a time-shifting feature, which lets you pause a live TV program and resume watching it when you're ready.

With its myriad video and TV features, the All-in-Wonder Radeon offers smoother interoperability than the Matrox board. Factor in its superior 3D performance, and choosing the Allin-Wonder Radeon over the G450 eTV is a nobrainer, despite its higher price.

-Neil Randall

tory. The All-in-Wonder Radeon also outper-

A vast selection of video and TV features

cameras) ships in the box.

COMPANY: ATI Technologies Markham, ON, Canada 905-882-2600 www.ati.com LIST PRICE: \$329.99 et Price It! 3 4 2 5 6 For real-time pricing, go to priceit.zdnet.com and enter numb



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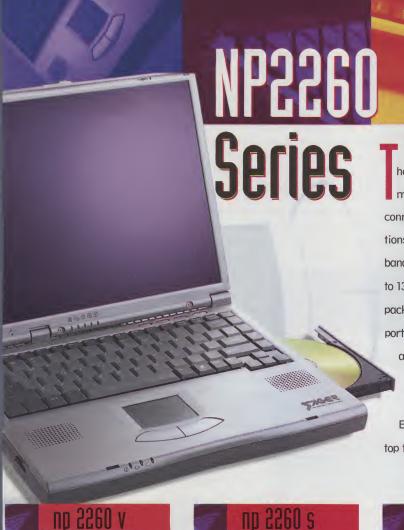
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- 1 TV-Out Port & 1 Video-In Port
- Other Ports: 2 USB, 1S, 1P, Ext. Keyboard and Ext. CRT
- Microsoft® Windows® ME
- Deluxe Carrying Case
- Weight: 9.5 lbs with Battery
- 14.0"w x 11.0"d x 2.2"h
- Sager's Umbrella Protection Policy



- 15.0" SXGA+ Active Matrix Display
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- 15.0" SXGA+ Active Matrix Display
- Intel® Pentium® III Processor 866MHz
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- 14.1" XGA Active Matrix Display
- Intel® Pentium® III Processor 933MHz
- Integrated 4X AGP Graphics with 32MB Max. User Definable Share Memory Architecture
- 128MB 133MHz SDRAM

14.1" XGA Active Matrix Display

20.0GB Ultra DMA Hard Drive

3.5" 1.44MB Floppy Disk Drive

Built-In Touchpad Pointing Device

Infra Red, Wireless Fast IR Interface

1 IEEE-1394 Port and 1 TV-out Port

A4 Size Windows® 95 Keyboard

Weight: 7.0 lbs with Battery

Sager's Umbrella Protection Policy

Microsoft® Windows® ME

Deluxe Carrying Case

12.1"w x 10.0"d x 1.48"h

Other Ports: 2 USB, 1S, 1P, Ext. Keyboard

Smart Lithium-Ion Battery

1 Type II PCMCIA Slot

8X Max. DVD-ROM Drive²

256MB 133MHz SDRAM

256KB On-Die L2 Cache

■ 3D Surround Sound

and Ext. CRT

Intel® Pentium® III Processor 1.0GHz

Integrated 4X AGP Graphics with 32MB Max.

User Definable Share Memory Architecture

Integrated 56K V90 Modem⁴ + 10/100 Ethernet

3 Hot-Keys for E-Mail, Browser and API

- 10.0GB Ultra DMA Hard Drive
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- 256KB On-Die L2 Cache
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- Smart Lithium-Ion Battery
- Built-In Touchpad Pointing Device
- 1 Type II PCMCIA Slot
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- Other Ports: 2 USB, 1S, 1P, Ext. Keyboard and Ext. CRT
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- Deluxe Carrying Case
- Weight: 7.0 lbs with Battery
- 12.1"w x 10.0"d x 1.48"h
- Sager's Umbrella Protection Policy

- 13.3" XGA Active Matrix Display Intel® Pentium® III Processor 866MHz
- Integrated 4X AGP Graphics with 32MB Max. User Definable Share Memory Architecture
- 128MB 133MHz SDRAM
- 10.0GB Ultra DMA Hard Drive
- 24X Max. CD-ROM Drive1
- Integrated 56K V90 Modem⁴ + 10/100 Ethernet
- 3 Hot-Keys for E-Mail, Browser and API
- 256KB On-Die L2 Cache
- 3.5" 1.44MB Floppy Disk Drive
- 3D Surround Sound
- Smart Lithium-Ion Battery Built-In Touchpad Pointing Device
- 1 Type II PCMCIA Slot
- Infra Red, Wireless Fast IR Interface
- 1 IEEE-1394 Port and 1 TV-out Port
- Other Ports: 2 USB, 1S, 1P, Ext. Keyboard and Ext. CRT
- A4 Size Windows® 95 Keyboard
- Microsoft® Windows® ME
- Deluxe Carrying Case
- Weight: 7.0 lbs with Battery
- 12.1"w x 10.0"d x 1.48"h
- Sager's Umbrella Protection Policy

Options

- CD-RW Drive
- Iomega® Zip Drive (NP8560)
- Numeric Keypad
- USB Video-Camera Secondary Hard Disk Drive (NP8560)

Saoer's Umbrella Protection Policu

- 30-Day Money-Back Guarantee. If the equipment does not work as promised, or if you are not fully satisfied, we will issue a full refund upon the return of all original equipment.
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- 72-Hour Repair Promise. For the rest of the 1-year warranty period, if it takes more than 72-hours to repair your computer, we'll pay 2nd day air return shipping charge.
- 1-Year Parts and Labor Limited Warranty.
- Lifetime Toll-Free Technical Support.

Umbrella Policy Applies to End Users in the United States of America and in Canada only and 48-Hour/ 72-Hour repair policies apply to hardware only. Software problems may take longer.

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read rate. CD-RW write and re-write speeds vary and list only the mum possible speed. Actual CD-ROM, DVD-ROM, CD-RW speeds vary and are often less than the maximum possible speed. 4: Maxi

www.sagernotebook.com



HARDWARE

HP LASERJET 3200

The Multifunction Misses Its Cue

N ALL-IN-ONE MULTIFUNCTION DEVICE SEEMS especially well matched to laser-printer technology. Laser printing's performance and quality better suit the needs of moderate-volume faxing and printing than inkjet technology does.

Unfortunately, Hewlett-Packard Co.'s LaserJet 3200 doesn't meet our expectations for all-in-one gratification.

In fact, the LaserJet 3200 emphasizes the big drawback of multifunction units, namely that if one thing breaks, the whole device is useless. Start with buggy software: HP promised a fix but hadn't produced one by the time we went to press. Also, during our tests, a fatal fax error locked up the whole unit.

Rated at 9 pages per minute (ppm), the LaserJet 3200's effective print speed is closer to 7 ppm because it took 25 seconds to print the first page. The overall quality of text and graphics

was quite good, however. The unit offers several different print modes and resolutions, though we saw little appreciable speed or quality difference among them, even under a loupe.

As a fax machine, the unit presented myriad difficulties, ranging from occasional system crashes when faxing from the PC, to the aforementioned fatal error on a stand-alone outgoing fax. The LaserJet 3200 also serves as a speedy sheetfed scanner-it takes about 10 seconds to scan a letter-size monochrome page. But its gray-scale scans are mediocre in quality, with washed-out shadow details, and it's difficult to feed sheets in straight. Also, even

> though the unit supports color scans, it automatically compresses the images.

> > The HP LaserJet

Director software we tested is typical of that provided with multifunction devices. It provides a launch bar through which you access all of the device's capabilities—scan, e-mail, fax, OCR, and document management. But it overlooks some important configuration settings, such as your area-code information. Another complaint: The input paper tray holds only 150 sheets.

All in all, this all-in-one device proved more trouble than it's worth.

—Lori Grunin

EDITORS' RATING 8.3

RATED I TO 10

FEATURES .

VALUE

INSTALLATION.
PERFORMANCE

Large capacity; quiet;

Can't match overstated transfer rate

PRODUCT: Seagate Barracuda ATA III ST340824A

www.seagate.com MFR. EST. PRICE: \$180

Seagate Technology Scotts Valley, CA; 877-271-3285

ZDNet Price It!"

For real-time pricing, go to priceit.zdnet.com and enter number.

3 4 2 7 9



SEAGATE BARRACUDA ATA III ST340824A

The Sound of Storage Silence

A HARD DRIVE WITH A 40GB CAPACITY, A 7,200-RPM spin rate, 2MB of cache, an ATA/100 interface, and a \$180 price should be enough to grab your attention. It had better be: Seagate Technology's Barracuda ATA III ST340824A

is also so quiet that you probably wouldn't notice it otherwise.

Seagate's Barracuda ATA II hard drives have long been an easy choice for both home PCs and RAID drive arrays because they're reliable, inexpensive, and fast. The new Barracuda ATA III lineup, currently capped by the 40GB ST340824A, is even faster. The Barracuda supports a maximum 500Mbps transfer rate from the platter to its internal cache, and a 100MB/sec transfer rate from cache to the ATA/100 interface. All told, according to Seagate, the Barracuda is capable of a 30MB/sec average



sustained transfer rate, though that's not quite realistic. The application calling for the data, as well as delays built into the way PCs handle data, shrink those ratings somewhat.

Installed in our 800MHz Dell Dimension B800r testbed equipped with a Promise Technology ATA/100 interface card, the Barracuda tore through our tests, scoring 8,840 on Business Disk WinMark 99 and 22,300 on High-End Disk WinMark 99. That's more than 25 percent higher than the average configuration that ships in most new systems today.

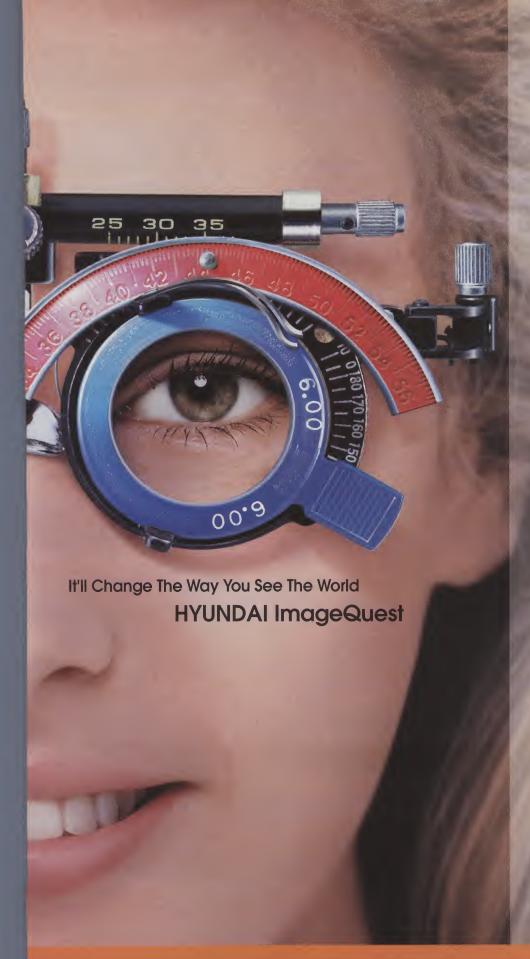
> We've only seen better throughput in striped RAID configurations and Windows 2000 systems.

At a cost of less than half a cent per megabyte,

the ST340824A matches the 40GB Maxtor DiamondMax Plus on both price and specs. Noise-sensitive users will also appreciate Seagate's SeaShield technology. The SeaShield is a foam pad topped by a metal cover that's mounted on the circuit-board side. It's an absolute blessing for RAID configurations with multiple drives.

With a quiet, high-performance drive that's this inexpensive, there's really no reason to look elsewhere. -Bill O'Brien



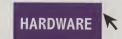


·MYUNDAI

Monitors are the windows that connect us to the world. So they need to be brilliant, accurate and clear, and specifically designed for the task at hand. Hyundai Monitor has now been reborn as Hyundai ImageQuest, a company created to develop and market a complete range of specialized and advanced image products. From CRT monitors to TFT LCDs, web terminals, PDAs and PC cameras, Hyundai ImageQuest is combining the know-how of the past 14 years with the skills to create and develop the most advanced technologies. The world you want to see will become a great deal clearer.







Boomin' Sound

OGITECH'S FOUR-CHANNEL SOUNDMAN XTRUSIO DSR-100 speaker set targets gamers and home-theater fans unwilling to settle for two-dimensional output. It's an attractive and ruggedly built system, but its bass-heavy sound will disappoint all but the most serious of gamers. Our test system produced a bombastic low end and decent volume levels, but it lacked

the clarity and extended high end of

competing systems.

One problem is the Xtrusio's underdesigned hardware. Its large extruded-aluminum bass unit contains only a single 6-inch driver. The four 6-inch-high satellites each consume a mere 9-square-inch footprint but are equipped with modest 2.25-inch cones. Although Logitech claims a total of 100 RMS watts of amplification-52 watts for the bass and 12 watts for each satellite-these figures are quoted at a total harmonic distortion level of 10 percent.

When measured at more listenable distortion levels, the power ratings are much lower.

The Xtrusio's handy wired remote offers master volume and front-back fade controls, as well as a mute button and headphone jack. But the system provides no way to fine-tune treble and bass levels.

A bigger flaw is the system's lack of subwoofer-level controls. During our listening tests, we found that the Xtrusio's powerful subwoofer often overwhelmed the satellites, a problem aggravated by the system's high 160Hz crossover frequency and muted high end. The result was a midrange that lacked clarity and was especially muddy during bass-heavy passages.

> Despite these problems, the Xtrusio isn't all bad. Our test unit did distort at higher listening levels, but at moderate volumes, it pumped

out wall-shaking bass. The system accepts both analog and digital S/PDIF four-channel input and ships with a generous software bundle that includes a solid selection of digitalmusic applications. The Xtrusio won't impress audiophiles, but it's worth considering if you're looking for a reasonably priced fourchannel gaming system.



PHILIPS 140S

A Sweet Display Without the

HILIPS' 14.1-INCH 140S LCD MONITOR PROVIDES about the same viewing area as a typical 15-inch CRT. Unlike a CRT, however, it has a bantam footprint and weighs a little more than 10 pounds. Moreover, its \$599.99 esti-

mated price is right on target for this size screen.

Printed documentation is sparse, but the monitor has relatively few features to explain. It uses a standard analog VGA connector and a captive cable. You won't find any USB ports, speakers, or a microphone. Connect the power and signal cables, and you're done. Windows automatically recognizes the monitor, making installation easy. The monitor has an auto button that syncs to the signal and adjusts the picture

size, position, and timing.

The screen has a decent horizontal viewing angle, but the vertical viewing angle is more limited. We used software from DisplayMate (www.displaymate.com) to put the display through its paces at its native 1,024x768 (XGA) resolution. The brightness control was not as effective as the contrast in adjusting the image. The screen glowed brighter along the bottom third, which was more noticeable on a full black screen than on one that was all white.

> Color tracking was solid, and continuous color ramps showed only faint banding. We noticed no ghosting or streaking, even on high-contrast images, and even complex patterns were free of pixel jitter. The monitor scales up images at lower resolu-

tions to fill the screen, and we found them smooth and sharp with only minimal scaling artifacts.

The 140S has an attractive and functional design, with good access to cable connections and a simple tiltand-swivel base. But there's no getting around the fact that this monitor is smaller than the 15-inch models that dominate this category. If you're going to spring for an LCD, you might as well spend another \$100 or so for a 15-inch model instead. -Alfred Poor

EDITORS' RATING 4.8 RATED I TO 10 DESIGN... SOUND QUALITY.

Generous software bundle; deep bass; decent volume levels; reasonably priced for a fourchannel system; stylish packaging Muddy midrange and muted high end; too bass-heavy for many types of source material; no bass-level controls: no tone controls or individual-channel volume controls; no rear-speaker stands

PRODUCT: Logitech SoundMan Xtrusio DSR-100 COMPANY: Logitech Fremont, CA 800-231-7717, 702-269-3457 www.logitech.com MFR. EST. PRICE: \$179.95

ZDNet Price It!" 3 4 2 6 5

For real-time pricing, go to priceit.zdnet.com and enter number.

—Don Labriola

EDITORS' RATING 6.6 RATED I TO 10

FEATURES IMAGE QUALITY VALUE

Good image quality and scaling of lower resolutions; relatively inexpensive; tilt-and-

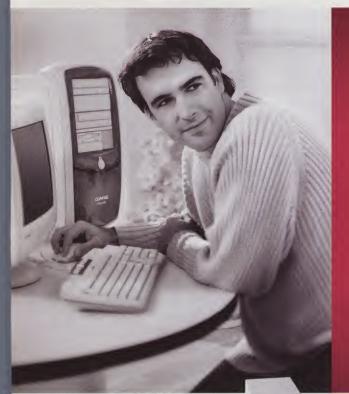
Minimal paper documenta-tion; no digital interface or USB; narrow vertical viewing angle

PRODUCT: Philips 140S COMPANY: Philips Consu Electronics of North America Atlanta, GA; 800-835-3506 www.pcstuff.philips.com MFR. EST. PRICE: \$599.99



For real-time pricing, go to priceit.zdnet.com and enter number.





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Go Digital With at SLR Look-Ali

ERIOUS PHOTOGRAPHERS ARE GOING TO LOVE the new 2.1-megapixel Olympus C-2100 Ultra Zoom because it gives them what they want in a single, lightweight, compact digital camera. Casual users will like it, too.

The \$1,000-estimated C-2100 resembles a traditional singlelens reflex (SLR) camera. Its 38mm to 380mm (35mm equivalent) fixed zoom lens can handle everything from a group portrait to

far-off action, while its digital image-stabilization circuitry gives you a steady shot even at the maximum telephoto range.

The C-2100's image quality is above average, and its print quality is outstanding. In our indoor-lighting test image, we noticed a slight brown tint on some shades of gray, and reds were too vivid. Flesh tones appeared warm and natural, however,



and the colors were not oversaturated. Our outdoor-lighting sample image produced vivid magenta shades, but with good color balance and excellent detail.

The C-2100 has both an optical viewfinder and an LCD viewing panel. Instead of a typical rangefinder, the camera has a tiny 0.55-inch color liquid-crystal microdisplay, which draws less power than the larger panel, extending battery life.

Exposure settings range from automatic to completely manual, and the camera's features accommodate both snapshooters and serious photographers. The autofocus illuminator is rated for 2 to 10 feet and easily switches to manual focus. The C-2100 package includes rechargeable batteries and a charger, an

infrared remote control, and a comprehensive manual.

The 8MB SmartMedia memory card lets you take 16 highquality pictures at the maximum 1,600x1,200 resolution. The C-2100 also lets you record short QuickTime movies

with sound.

Novice photographers can pick up the C-2100 Ultra Zoom and take pictures without any instructions, while advanced photographers will find that the camera won't frustrate them with limitations. This is one camera that can meet the needs of many different users.

PHILIPS TOUCAM XS

Weak Webcam Puts Focus on Price

T FIRST GLANCE, THE PHILIPS TOUCAM XS LOOKS like a bargain. Imagine paying only about \$40 for a USB

Webcam with a complete software bundle. Unfortunately, the adage about getting what you pay for is borne out here by the actual camera hardware, which barely qualifies as mediocre.

This USB cam supports 30-frameper-second color video at 352x288 or still images at 640x480. The driver software offers a wide range of adjustable settings, including automatic brightness and backlight compensation, as well as hue, contrast, saturation, and sharpness. Also included is a 2-meter USB cable and an odd-looking tripod mounting system that lets you fix it above your monitor or hang it behind a laptop screen.

Unfortunately, the ToUcam XS doesn't deliver in the most important



area-image quality. Under normal homeoffice lighting, the images it produced were very dark and muddy. Adding another light pointed directly at the subject helped little. The Intel PC Camera, which admittedly costs double the price of the ToUcam, had no problems under identical lighting and placement conditions. The ToUcam performed much better under bright fluorescent lighting, however.

> It's a shame the hardware doesn't work better, because the software bundle is impressive. The ToUcam XS comes with four Reality Fusion camera games, SpotLife software for broadcasting live Webcam shows, and a set of useful utilities. The simple V-record utility

lets you record video and audio to AVI files, and Ulead Photo Explorer 6.0 simplifies managing captured images. VideoLink Mail software lets you capture compact, self-playing video files to send in email. You'll even find a TWAIN driver for capturing images in third-party programs.

With a better camera, the Philips ToUcam XS would be an impressive package. As it stands, it's proof that some deals are, indeed, too good to be true. —Denny Atkin

	EDITORS' RATING 6.8
	RATED I TO 10
DE	IGN
EA:	E OF USE
FE.	TURES
	GE QUALITY
PEF	FORMANCE
VAI	.UE
	Good image quality: versa-

tile lens; compact, wellbalanced design; easy-to-use electronic viewfinder
Viewfinder resolution a little
low; requires separate editing program for all but simple changes; potentially daunting controls; priced at the top end for

PRODUCT: Olympus C-2100 Ultra Zoom COMPANY: Olympus America Melville, NY

a 2.1-megapixel camera

800-622-6372, 631-844-5000 www.olympusamerica.com MFR. EST. PRICE: \$1,000



For real-time pricing, go to priceit.zdnet.com and enter number.

-Alfred Poor

EDITORS' RATING 5.0 RATED | TO 10

DESIGN. EASE OF USE IMAGE QUALITY.

Compact; inexpensive, unified software launcher Poor image quality without bright lighting; sparse printed documentation

PRODUCT: COMPANY: Philips Consumer Electronics of North America Atlanta, GA; 800-835-3506 www.pcstuff.philips.com MFR. EST. PRICE: \$39.95



For real-time pricing, go to priceit.zdnet.com and enter number.

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UNITEDM3000 AMD ATHLON THUNDERBIRO PROCESSOR & 266MHZ TRANSFER RATE NEW 32MB OOR NVIOIA GEFORCE2 PRD 4X AGE AMD 30GB 7200 RPM ULTRA ATA100 HO Athlon 1.44MB FLOPPY DRIVE, 2 USB PORTS 16X OVD-ROM ORIVE 56K V.90 FAX/MODEM W/VOICE CREATIVE LABS SOUND BLASTER 12B PCI PNP ALTEC LANSING ACS 45 SOUND SYSTEM INTERNET KEYBOARD & SCROLLING MOUSE MICROSOFT WINDOWS MILLENNIUM OR 9B 2ND FD. THE ULTIMATE PC BUNDLE: STAROFFICE SUITE, PERSONAL PRODUCTIVITY, INTERNET & UTILITY, ENTERTAINMENT. ENLIGHT 7237 MID-TDWER ATX 300WT (AMD CERTIFIED) CYBERVISION C70 17" .27 PNP,12B0X1024

900MHZ · · \$1139	1.2GHZ · · · · \$1209
1GHZ · · · · \$1169	1.3GHZ · · · · \$1239
1 1047 \$1189	

UNITEDM2000

AMD ATHLON THUNDERBIRD PROCESSOR & 266MHZ TRANSFER RATE 128MB 133MHZ SDRAM NEW 32MB NVIDIA GEFDRCE2 MX 4X AGP AMD 20GB 7200 RPM ULTRA ATA100 HD Athlo 1.44MB FLOPPY DRIVE, 2 USB PORTS BX/4X/32X MAX CD-RW DRIVE 6 56K V.90 FAX/MODEM W/VOICE SOUND BLASTER, PCI 3D SOUND CARD, 4- CHANEL ALTEC LANSING ACS 33 SOUND SYSTEM INTERNET KEYBDARD & SCRDLLING MOUSE MICROSOFT WINDOWS MILLENNIUM OR 9B 2ND ED. THE ULTIMATE PC BUNDLE: STAROFFICE SUITE, PERSONAL PRODUCTIVITY, INTERNET & UTILITY, ENTERTAINMENT. ENLIGHT 7237 MID-TOWER ATX 300WT (AMD CERTIFIED)

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CYBERVISIDN C70 17" .27 PNP,12B0X1024

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UNITEDM9000

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MICROSDFT WINDDWS MILLENNIUM DR 9B 2ND EDITIDN THE ULTIMATE PC BUINDLE: STAROFFICE SUITE, PERSONAL PRODUCTIVITY, INTERNET & UTILITY, ENTERTAINMENT.

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1.3GHZ · · ·		 		٠.	٠.	٠.	·\$1689
1.4GHZ · · ·		 ٠.	٠.	• •			·\$1819
1.5GHZ · · ·	• •	 • •	• •	٠.	• •		·\$1939

UNITEDM8000

NEW INTEL PENTIUM 4 PROCESSOR & 400MHZ SYSTEM BUS 12BMB PCB00 RDRAM SAMSUNG NEW 32MB DDR ATI RADEDN 4X AGP 30GB 7200RPM ULTRA ATA100 HD 1.44MB FLDPPY DRIVE, 2 USB PDRTS BX/4X/32X MAX.CD-RW DRIVE 56K V.90 FAX/MODEM W/VOICE CREATIVE LABS SOUND BLASTER 12BPCI PNF ALTEC LANSING ACS33 SOUND SYSTEM INTERNET KEYBOARD & SCRDLLING MDUSE MICRDSDFT WINDDWS MILLENNIUM OR 2000 PROFESSIDNAL THE ULTIMATE PC BUNDLE:STARDFFICE SUITE,PERSDNAL PRODUCTIVITY, INTERNET & UTILITY, ENTERTAINMENT. INWIN ATX MID TOWER CASE W/300WT CYBERVISION C70 17" .27 PNP,1280X1024

1.3GHZ •	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	·\$1439
1.4GHZ	٠	•	•	۰	•	۰	•	•	•			•	•	•	•	•	·\$1479
1.5GHZ •	۰	•	•	۰	٠	٠	۰	٠	۰	۰	۰	۰	٠	۰	۰	٠	·\$1699

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800MHZ··\$1169	933MHZ · · \$1239
866MHZ · · \$1189	1GHZ · · · · \$1249

CYBERVISION C70 17" .27 PNP,1280X1024

UNITEDM6000

INTEL PENTIUM III PROCESSOR & 133MHZ TRANSFER RATE (266MHZ FSB OPTIONAL) 12BMB PC133MHZ SDRAM (266MHZ ODR DPTIDNAL) NEW 32MB NVIDIA GEFORCE2 MX 4X AGE 30GB 7200RPM ULTRA ATA1D0 HD 1.44MB FLOPPY DRIVE, 2 USB PORTS BX/4X/32X MAX CD-RW DRIVE 56K V.90 FAX/MODEM W/VDICE PCI 3D WAVETABLE STEREO CARD ALTEC LANSING ACS 33 SOUND SYSTEM INTERNET KEYBDARD & SCRDLLING MOUSE

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IBM THINKPAD X20

An Ultraportable With Emphasis on 'Ultra'

F YOU'VE EVER LUGGED A 9-POUND NOTEBOOK THROUGH AN AIRPORT terminal, or spent a day trudging around a trade show with one over your shoulder, you'll really appreciate the lightweight IBM ThinkPad X20. At 3.1 pounds—and an incredible 3.9-pound travel weight, including the AC adapter—it feels so remarkably light you might forget it's in your bag or briefcase. Thanks to the ThinkPad X20's tapered bottom half, it seems smaller than it actually is (1.1x11x8.9 inches).

The \$1,899 ThinkPad X20 has expansion options in spades. Though many ultraportables—or full-size, three-spindle, 8-pound notebooks, for that matter—only have one USB port, the ThinkPad X20 comes with two. Its CompactFlash slot is ideal for sharing data with a digital camera or a handheld PC that uses the same storage medium. This

can really help conserve digital-camera battery life while on the go. And a special socket called the UltraPort sits atop the screen, accommodating options such as a desktop camera, a Bluetooth wireless transceiver, or flatpanel speakers. The ThinkPad X20 also has a built-in 56Kbps modem and 10/100Mbps Ethernet adapter.

The optional Ultrabay can host myriad devices, including a CD-RW drive, a DVD-ROM, a second battery or hard drive, an LS-120 drive, or a Zip drive. The bay itself plugs into one of the ThinkPad X20's USB ports or its Type II PC Card slot, and

interface cables are included for both connections. The only downside is that the Ultrabay requires its own power supply, which limits its portability.

If you prefer an expansion solution that's similar to the Compaq Armada M300's underbelly dock, IBM offers the optional \$199 UltraBase X2, which includes an integrated 3.5-inch floppy drive and a bay for any of the aforementioned devices. It also provides the serial and parallel ports not found on the notebook itself, and a pair of stereo speakers to augment the notebook's feeble single speaker. One drawback of the UltraBase X2 is that it adds 2.2 pounds to the overall weight of the configuration. Still, you can

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pack it in your luggage or leave it in your hotel room to have the advantages of a CD-ROM or DVD drive on a trip without actually having to lug it around.

Compared with other ultraportables, the base configuration of the ThinkPad X20 we tested is inexpensive because IBM made some compromises, including a 500MHz Celeron processor instead of a Pentium chip (a 600MHz Pentium III is available) and only 4MB of video memory. Nonetheless, the ThinkPad X20 was a capable performer on our benchmark tests, even besting some systems based on faster Pentium III processors in a few areas. Its battery life was 2 hours and 14 minutes, which is average for an ultraportable; many lightweight notebooks have severely constrained battery life as a trade-off for lighter weight and smaller volume.

12.1-inch TFT screen is sharp and bright, but its relatively low SVGA (800x600) resolution makes it seem cramped in comparison to the XGA (1,024x768) resolution we've come to expect. Some users will appreciate

the lower resolution on a 12.1-inch screen, however.

IBM's signature red pointing stick, which is rea-

sonably comfortable, will be a hindrance to those who prefer a touch pad. Sandwiched between the two mouse buttons, however, is a third button that conveniently turns the pointing stick into a "scrolling stick" so you can scroll through long documents and Web pages. The keyboard is well-designed and comfortable, but lacks the special Windows keys-a definite oversight. The keyboard's ThinkLight feature, which provides a bit of illumination for the keyboard in low-light situations with a tiny

high-intensity spotlight, is a nice touch.

IBM scores major points for providing a three-year warranty, along with one of the best support programs available. We would have liked to see the UltraBase X2 included in the base configuration, along with an optical (CD-ROM or DVD) drive to go with it; installing applications can be onerous over a network. In fairness to IBM, however, other similar ultraportables, such as Compaq's Armada M300, also charge extra for the expansion unit that includes the optical drive. All told, the IBM ThinkPad X20 is a very likable notebook, especially for users looking for expansion options.

-Rick Broida

SYSTEM: IBM ThinkPad X20 COMPANY: IBM Corp. Somers, NY; 800-772-2227 www.ibm.com/thinkpad AS TESTED: 500MHz Celeron; 128MB PC100 SDRAM; 10GB hard drive; ATI Rage Mobility-M1 video controller with 4MB RAM; 12.1-inch TFT SVGA LCD; Cirrus Logic Crystal SoundFusion CS4281 audio chip; integrated monaural speaker: integrated Mini-PCI combination V.90 modem and 10/100Mbps Ethernet; Windows 2000; Lotus SmartSuite Millennium Edition MFR. EST. PRICE: \$1,899

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FOSA 340S2

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HOUGH MANY DESKTOP-REPLACEMENT NOTEBOOKS COMPETE FOR your attention, those from the larger players almost invariably use Intel Corp.'s Mobile Pentium III processor with SpeedStep technology. Not so with Fosa's \$1,950 340S2 notebook PC. Like some other budget notebooks, the 340S2 uses a desktop Pentium III processor, which lacks SpeedStep and other power-saving features. The most dramatic side effect of using this less expensive chip is on battery life: The 340S2 lasted an even 2 hours on our BatteryMark 4.0 tests.

Like some other smaller notebook vendors, Fosa targets budget-conscious users who want the convenience of mobility a notebook brings, yet who won't actually be moving the unit that much. For this type of user, 2 hours of battery life is sufficient because the

notebook will be plugged into the wall most of the time. This makes the desktop Pentium III uniquely suited to this class of notebook because it fits so well with this lower-cost/occasional-mobility model.

The 340S2 packs an impressive list of features for a low-price notebook—enough to qualify it for the desktop-replacement category—all in a three-spindle package weighing 7.4 pounds (8.3 pounds with power cord and adapter).

The system is based on an SiS630 chipset, which not only supports the processor, but also provides video, audio, modem, and network functions, similar to Intel's 815E mobile chipset. This integration doesn't appear to have a negative effect on performance. Though the 340S2's benchmark scores were a bit low for an 800MHz notebook—it was bested on many tests by 750MHz competitors—the unit has a responsive feel.

We were pleasantly surprised by the video speed, given that there's no dedicated 3D chip. Despite this, the graphics subsystem on the SiS630 provided 3D performance similar to that of a midrange ATI Rage Mobility chipset. The notebook has no dedicated video memory, but you can assign up to 32MB of main system memo-



ry for video. Playing the 3D-graphics-intensive MechWarrior 4 with 8MB assigned to video, the 340S2 kept up admirably, displaying a smooth frame rate even with the detail level cranked up. Plus, the image looked great on the 14.1-inch TFT XGA display.

DVD playback using the bundled WinDVD software was excellent. The system lacks composite or S-Video output, however, so forget about displaying DVDs on a television. Despite the absence of a dedicated audio chip, the notebook pumps out outstanding sound clarity and volume, thanks to the stereo speakers mounted just below the sharp LCD screen.

Both the optical drive (your choice of an 8x DVD-ROM or a 24x CD-ROM) and the floppy drive are nonremovable. The 340S2 has a full suite of expansion ports, including jacks for the built-in V.90 modem and 10/100Mbps Ethernet, so it's ready to connect to the Net out of the box, either to a dialup or broadband connection. Unfortunately, the unit has only a single USB port.

For the most part, the physical design of the notebook is very good, if somewhat nondescript. The keyboard is comfort-

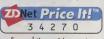
able, the touch-pad buttons are responsive, and the twotone silver case looks both stylish

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and professional. The one oddity is the placement of a heavy-duty cooling fan on the bottom of the unit, along with a note warning not to block the grille—impossible to do if you plan to use this laptop on your lap.

The warranty coverage is less impressive. Fosa provides a 30-day money-back guarantee, during which time a 48-hour repair turnaround is promised. For the remainder of the one-year war-

ranty, the maximum turnaround time is five days. Also, should you have to return the notebook for repair, you'll have to pay shipping one way. An optional two- or three-year warranty extension through Philips Magnavox is available at extra cost. Fosa does offer lifetime toll-free tech support, but only between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. (ET). We prefer round-the-clock support, because problems often don't limit themselves to normal business hours. The notebook does come with a detailed, well-written manual.

The Fosa 340S2 is an average performer lacking some of the refinement of majorbrand notebooks, as well as a few key features, such as a composite or S-Video output. But if price is your first priority, and battery life isn't, the 340S2 is worth a look.

—Denny Atkin

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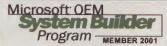












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WINBOOK Z1

Portable Performance In a Solid Package

HEN YOU PURCHASE A NOTEBOOK THAT'S NOT DESIGNED BY ONE of the "big names"—Compaq, Dell, or micronpc.com, for example—you may expect to find compromises in construction and performance. Although WinBook may not be as well-known as those companies, the company does have years of experience in the notebook market. In fact, WinBook is a notebook specialist—there's not a desktop to be found on this direct vendor's Web site. An example of this specialization is the new \$3,300 WinBook Z1, a fast-performing, solid notebook able to hold its own against better-known competitors.

In fact, the WinBook Z1's case, keyboard, and screen make it a near twin to the Dell Inspiron 7000 series, except it's quite a bit thinner (at 1.8x13x10 inches) and more than 2 pounds lighter at 7.6 pounds (8.5 pounds with power cord and AC adapter). The WinBook has a beautiful, bright 15.1-inch TFT screen with a maximum resolution of 1,400x1,050 pixels (SXGA+). If you find text too small for your tastes at that resolution, the video con-

troller chip handles lower resolutions with aplomb, filling the screen without jaggies or other scaling artifacts.

The LCD is driven by an ATI Rage Mobility 128 graphics chip with 16MB of dedicated RAM, which provides topnotch performance for business and gaming. At press time, the ATI was the fastest 3D chip currently shipping in notebooks, and we were able to run cutting-edge games such as Giants: Citizen

Kabuto smoothly in 32-bit color mode. Software DVD playback of From the Earth to the Moon, a title that can cause even hardware DVD-playback systems to stutter, was very smooth. Video performance on ordinary business applications was strictly top-drawer.

The rest of the hardware is equally impressive. With an 850MHz Pentium III, 128MB of RAM, and a very fast (and big) 30GB IBM hard drive, the WinBook Z1 is a speedy performer, ranking near the top of its class in our benchmark tests. The audio subsystem is outstanding, with loud, clear speakers and dedicated volume buttons. You won't need separate speakers to watch



a movie in a hotel room.

Though you're not likely to confuse the WinBook Z1 with an ultraportable, it's not oversized for a notebook with such a large screen. The extra width gives WinBook the room to fit one of the best keyboards we've seen on a notebook. With full-size keys, deep key travel, and a comfortable feel, touch typists should have no problem approximating desktop speed. Below the keyboard, a large wrist rest surrounds a Synaptics touch pad, which itself can mimic the actions of a thumbwheel mouse.

The Z1 we looked at ships with a builtin floppy drive, as well as a removable

DVD-ROM drive. Configurations with CD-ROM, CD-RW, and DVD/CD-RW combo drives are also available, and the media bay can also accept a Zip drive or a second battery.

EDITORS' RATING 6.7

RATED I TO 10

Wonderful keyboard; excellent screen; fast perfor-

mance; top-notch video support

Short standard warranty; no 24/7 tech support; no

800-651-4519, 614-334-1496

SDRAM; 30GB hard drive; 8x DVD

AS TESTED: 850MHz Pentium III; 128MB 100MHz

drive; ATI Rage Mobility 128

graphics controller with 16MB RAM: 15.1-inch TFT SXGA+LCD:

ESS Maestro 2E sound chip; inte-

grated V.90 modem; 10/100Mbps PC Card network adapter;

Windows 2000 Professional; MGI

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SERVICE AND SUPPORT

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DESIGN......

FEATURES

VALUE

All the basic ports are here, including an S-Video output for connection to a TV or projector and a built-in 56Kbps modem. Unfortunately, the system has only a single USB port. Oddly, built-in Ethernet isn't available, but WinBook does offer a

10/100Mbps PC Card bundled with the

WinBook

offers the Z1 with Windows Me or, at no extra cost, Windows 2000 Professional. Our tests were undertaken with Windows 2000, which we like for its exceptional stability. Unfortunately, the system lacks an office suite; the only bundled software is MGI SoftDVD Max for DVD playback. WinBook contends that its customer base doesn't want an office suite included, but if that's so, the company must know something that Dell, Gateway, and micronpc.com don't.

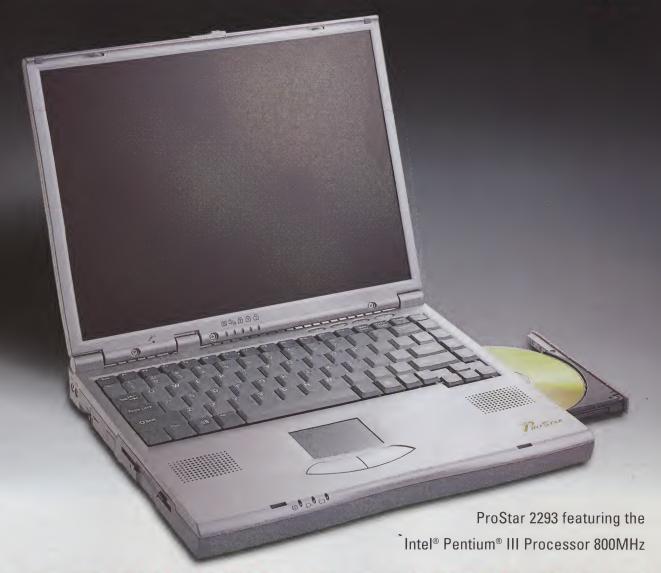
WinBook's standard parts-andlabor warranty lasts only a year, but the company does offer an

optional three-year, transferable PremiumCare extended warranty for only \$99, available to residents of every state except Florida. This extended warranty also includes the cost of free overnightexpress shipping to and from WinBook for repairs. The notebook is also backed by a 30-day money-back guarantee. Tech support is toll-free, but not on a 24/7 basis, and not at all on Sunday.

If you're looking for desktop-level performance in a comfortably portable package, the WinBook Z1 is a worthy choiceprovided you can live with the support package and lack of application software.

-Denny Atkin

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HP OMNIBOOK 500

A Smart Travel Accessory For Corporate Go-Getters

BEST

SIZE CAN BE A DILEMMA FOR ON-THE-GO BUSINESSPEOPLE. They want a light, compact notebook that won't dislocate their shoulders as they trot through the airport. But small notebooks usually mean compromises with ergonomics and battery life, and they don't want to make

the sacrifice. Hewlett-Packard Co. has the solution with its Omnibook 500, a stylish 3.7-pound ultraportable that can be instantly converted into a fully equipped, full-size notebook by clipping on an expansion base.

The Omnibook 500 is far from the first "two-piece" notebook on the market, but it's easily the most stylish. With its silver-blue titanium case, bright blue LEDs, and snazzy rubberized accents, this is a slick, sophisticated-looking executive status symbol. At just an inch thick, deciding whether to bring this lightweight looker along is a no-brainer.

And even with the 1.6pound expansion base in place, it's still lighter than most one-piece notebooks.

Of course, small size makes for some compromises. In its stand-alone configuration, the Omnibook 500 sports a single PC Card slot, dual USB ports, a VGA output, and connectors for the built-in 56Kbps modem and 10/100Mbps Ethernet. Though the notebook includes a roomy 20GB hard drive, it has no drive bays, so you'll need the expansion base to add a floppy or CD drive.

A 600MHz mobile SpeedStep Pentium III, backed by 128MB of RAM, powers the Omnibook 500. Though 600MHz may seem modest, there's plenty of oomph here for typical business applications.

The 12.1-inch TFT screen is sharp and vivid, and you can dim the backlight to extend battery life a bit. Not that you'll need to: The notebook lasted nearly 4 hours on BatteryMark 4.0, and you can add up to two additional batteries in the expansion base to extend running time to nearly 10 hours.

An ATI Rage Mobility-M1 chip provides excellent performance for business apps and DVD playback, although its 3D performance is merely acceptable. The keyboard is about an inch narrower than most notebooks', but the tactile feedback is so good you should have little problem adjusting.



Cursor control comes from a pointing stick in the center of the keyboard, and three control buttons sit just above the rubberized wrist rest. On the bottom of the notebook you'll find what may be the wimpiest speaker in notebook history; plan to use the headphone jack if you're not connected to the expansion base.

The speakers on the expansion base are as powerful as the built-in speaker is anemic. We don't mean good for a notebookthis Polk Audio sound system belts out audio loud and clear, about the same quality you'd expect from a small portable stereo. And there's a bonus: The expansion base can play audio CDs even if the notebook's not connected. In addition to CD audio-control buttons, the base has a small LCD that provides CD status, battery level, and other readouts.

Two drive bays in the expansion base

can hold various combinations of floppy, 24x CD-ROM, CD-RW, 6x DVD, LS-120, and Zip drives, as well as extra batteries. Be aware that these drives are rather pricey; the CD-RW, for example, will set you back nearly \$500.

The expansion base adds almost all the ports that are missing from the main notebook, including parallel, serial, dual PS/2, and S-Video. It also dou-

bles as a port replicator, duplicating almost all of the notebook's built-in ports. There's one

EDITORS' RATING 7.3 RATED I TO 10 EASE OF USE FEATURES SERVICE AND SUPPORT

Light and compact; sleek design; versatile drive and battery options; solid construction No IR port; short warranty

SYSTEM: HP Omnibook 500 Hewlett-Packard Co.

Palo Alto, CA 800-752-0900, 650-857-1501 www.hp.com

AS TESTED: 600MHz Pentium III; 128MB PC100 SDRAM; 20GB hard drive; 24x CD-ROM drive; ATI Rage Mobility M1 graphics controller with 8MB RAM; 12.1-inch TFT XGA LCD; ESS Maestro sound chip; single speaker in system unit, two stereo speakers in base unit; integrated V.90 modem; integrated 10/100Mbps Ethernet; Windows 2000; additional software

MFR. EST. PRICE: \$3,039 (including expansion base and CD-ROM)



For real-time pricing, go to priceit.zdnet.com and enter number.

odd omission here, however: Neither the notebook nor the expansion base has an infrared port. For years these ports went unused, but now that notebook owners are using them to hotsync their Palm devices and to print to IR-equipped printers, the port is noticeably absent.

The Omnibook 500 doesn't include any bundled application software, just some accessory programs such as MusicMatch Jukebox and McAfee VirusScan. This is not a great concern, however, since the Omnibook targets corporate users. There is one very useful bonus program: HP Presentation Ready. Press a dedicated button above the keyboard, and the system instantly loads your presentation software and changes the screen resolution to match your display device.

The included parts-and-labor warranty coverage lasts only a year, but HP offers optional warranty extensions at extra cost.

The HP Omnibook 500 offers impressive looks, excellent portability, good performance, and above-average configurability. And it'll elicit oohs and aahs from your co-workers, which is always a nice bonus.

-Denny Atkin

Top models include: Pentium® III Processor 750MHz' featuring Intel® SpeedStep" Technology CD-RW and DVD-ROM drives | Multimedia dock | 14.1" XGA LCD TFI screen | 18.00 Step |

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MOBILE

COMPAO MP2800 MICROPORTABLE PROJECTOR

Small, Light, And Very Bright

HAT'S COMPACT, LIGHTWEIGHT, AND SURE to break the association in your mind between "lugging" and "projector"? The Compaq MP2800 Microportable Projector. At just 3 pounds and 7.1x2.7x8.7 inches, the \$4,999 MP2800 projects an impressively bright image for a reasonable price.

The MP2800 employs Texas Instruments' popular Digital Light Processing (DLP) technology to create a crisp image. The projector's specifications include 24-bit color, a native 1,024x768 resolution, and the ability to scale down to 832x624, or up to a maximum of 1,280x1,024. Scaled images appear free of blocky text, with minor doses of the artifacts we often see in scaling. The 900-lumen image is bright enough that a 70-inch image is easily readable in a fully lit room.

Image quality on our tests ranged from acceptable to excellent, with no flaws deserving of mention. The 8-watt mono audio system sounds somewhat tinny, but it's easily loud enough for a large conference room.

Setup is easy. Plug in the power cord and the cable to your computer's video, and plug in an audio cable, if desired. You can also (or instead) attach a cable from an S-Video or composite-video source. Note one important limitation: The audio and video connectors, as well as the speaker, are in a multimedia unit that plugs into the DVI connector on the back of the projector. So if you use a digital video connection to the PC, you can't have audio or video.

The MP2800 has other minor drawbacks, notably the amount of heat and light that spills from the sides toward the front. These are balanced by the manual zoom, the padded case that comes with

the unit, and the remote control with a laser pointer built in. All told, the Compaq MP2800 Microportable Projector deserves a high ranking on your very short list.



MERLIN FOR RICOCHET WIRELESS PC CARD MODEM

A Wireless Wizard For Web Acess

VERYBODY IS TOUTING THE PROMISE OF WIREless Web access, but until now your only real options have been the slow 14.4Kbps connections of CDPD networks, or the watered-down content of PDA and cell-phone screens. These methods may soon go the way of the passenger pigeon, thanks to the Merlin for Ricochet Wireless PC Card Modem from Novatel Wireless.

Looking like an ordinary PC Card modem, with its own black flexible antenna, it's actually much more. The Merlin slips into any PC equipped with a Type II PC Card slot, and enables speeds up to 128Kbps on Metricom's Ricochet network. Merlin works with Windows and Macintosh laptops, as well as Pocket PC devices that can accommodate a PC Card device. You can access virtual private networks, too, and check e-mail in a flash.



To install the card, we ran the installation routine on our Windows 98 notebook and inserted the Merlin into a PC Card socket. Using Novatel's Merlin for Ricochet Modem Manager applet, which monitors network signal strength, we quickly established a connection and were online in minutes. With the Merlin's software reporting "excellent" reception, we consistently achieved speeds of 117Kbps monitored by ZDNet's bandwidth speed-test service (www.zdnet.com/cc/ bandwidth/speedtest500.html).

Right now Metricom has deployed its 128Kbps Ricochet network in 12 major urban

areas, including New York, Atlanta, Dallas, and San Francisco, with more regions in the works. In New York, we were able to get swift connec-

tions in our building lobby, at the Starbucks down the street, at LaGuardia Airport, and even in Brooklyn. But download speeds deteriorated the farther we went from Manhattan. Another caveat is the modem's voracious power appetite, especially when downloading or uploading lots of data.

The Merlin costs around \$299, depending on the service provider, and unlimited Web access has a flat fee of about \$80 a month. Though pricey, it may be worth it to high-end corporate users who want total Web connection without the cords. -Brian Bennett

EDITORS' RATING 7.6 RATED I TO 10 DESIGN IMAGE QUALITY.

Extremely small and lightweight; 1,024x768 native resolution; scales from other resolutions with few artifacts; image quality acceptable to excellent: surprisingly bright image; manual

Spills a great deal of heat and light; marginally tinny mono audio: can't plug in a digital monitor and have audio at the

PRODUCT: Compaq MP2800 Microportable Projector COMPANY: Compaq Computer Corp. Houston, TX; 800-345-1518 www.compaq.com MFR. EST. PRICE: \$4,999



For real-time pricing, go to priceit.zdnet.com and enter number.

-M. David Stone

EDITORS' RATING 7.4 RATED I TO 10

EASE OF USE PERFORMANCE VALUE

Easy setup; small size; fast performance; Expensive; only available in a few urban areas

PRODUCT: Merlin for

Ricochet Wireless PC Card COMPANY: Novatel Wireless San Diego, CA; 858-320-8800 www.novatelwireless.com

MFR. EST. PRICE: \$299 ZDNet Price It!

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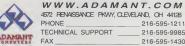
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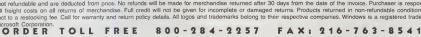
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SSENGIAL - NOTEBOOKS

Pinpointing the Perfect Portable

o choose the right notebook PC, get a clear idea of the tasks you'll need the laptop to perform and the features necessary to successfully complete them. The specs break down pretty well according to categories such as family, student, or gaming, so we used such categories to help you focus your search. (For a comprehensive selection of notebook

reviews, go to www.zdnet.com/

special/filters/sc/notebooks.)

If you're interested in replacing your home desktop with a notebook PC, you'll want a big, bright display, a comfortable keyboard, enough processing power to handle computer games (a lot), and plenty of storage for home pictures and MP3s. A typical system in this category will include a Pentium III processor, 128MB of RAM, a 10GB hard drive, a 14-inch TFT (active-matrix) display, a 56Kbps modem, an Ethernet adapter, and a DVD-ROM drive. You'll pay \$2,000 or more for such a desktopreplacement system.

Student

The best choice for most students is a value notebook (\$1,000 to \$1,800), suitable for word processing, e-mail, and Web browsing. A value notebook typically includes a Celeron or AMD K6-2+ processor, 32MB or 64MB of RAM, a 4GB hard drive, a 56Kbps modem, and a CD-ROM drive. (Go for 64MB of RAM if at all

possible.) Also appealing to students might be the Mac OS-based Apple iBook, with a 300MHz or 366MHz PowerPC G3 processor, 64MB of RAM, a 6GB hard drive, a 56Kbps modem, and a CD-ROM drive. Check with your school to see if you'll also need an Ethernet adapter for connecting to the campus network.

mainstream

Most users rely on their notebook PCs for word processing, spreadsheets, e-mail, and Web browsing. For these tasks, a mainstream notebook PC more than fits the bill. A mainstream notebook generally has midrange components: a Celeron or Pentium III processor, 32MB to 96MB RAM, a 4GB hard drive, a 56Kbps modem, a TFT display, and either a CD-ROM or

gaming and multimedia

Fun and games require a serious notebook PC. Graphics-intensive computer games, digital audio files, and desktop video all put a major drain on system resources. For these applications, you'll need a desktopreplacement system, which should include a Pentium III processor,

generally buy the most PC they can afford-either a thin-and-light unit for frequent travel (see the "Road Warrior" section) or a full-featured desktop-replacement system. Desktop-replacement notebooks in this class have everything: a Pentium III SpeedStep processor, 128MB of RAM, a 10GB hard drive, a 56Kbps modem, an Ethernet adapter, a 14-inch TFT display, and a DVD-ROM drive. These systems might also have swappable drive bays and optional port replicators to expand functionality. You'll pay anywhere from \$2,000 to \$4,000

128MB of RAM, a 10GB hard drive, a

14-inch TFT display, 8MB of graphics

(FireWire) interface, only available on

Apple PowerBook, with its 500MHz

PowerPC G3 processor and twin

FireWire interfaces, should be on

notebooks like these run from

\$3,000 to \$5,000.

SMALL BUSINESS

your short list. High-end multimedia

For a small-business user, the note-

book PC is an extension of the

office. That's why these users

memory, and a DVD-ROM drive. If

you plan on working with digital video, you'll also need an IEEE 1394

a handful of notebook PCs. The

category, depending upon your power requirements.

road warrior

The most popular choice for traveling executives is a thin and light notebook (in addition to their desktop PCs). These systems can be a mere inch thick and weigh from 3 to 6 pounds. They incorporate many of the high-end features of a desktop-replacement system, including a fast Celeron or Pentium III processor, 64MB to 128MB RAM, a 6GB hard drive, a 12- to 14-inch TFT display, a 56Kbps modem, and a DVD-ROM drive. Users willing to forgo some of these features for an even smaller, lighter package should check out mini-notebooks, weighing 4 pounds or less, with 10.4- to 12-inch displays and costing \$2,000 to \$3,000.

corporate

Corporations tend to standardize on a particular notebook maker and product line, but depending on their work habits, different employees may choose anything from a mini-notebook all the way up to a desktop-replacement system. That said, some features distinguish corporate notebooks. They generally include a Pentium III processor, 128MB of RAM, a 6GB hard drive, a 12- to 14-inch TFT display, a 56Kbps modem, an Ethernet adapter, and a CD-ROM drive. These systems can cost anywhere from \$2,000 to \$3,000.

BUDGET BUYER

The budget buyer has to cut some corners to get an affordable notebook, and prices typically start around \$900. Such systems include a slower Celeron or AMD K6-2+ processor, 32MB of RAM, a 4GB hard drive, a 56Kbps modem, a smaller, passive-matrix display, a less efficient nickel metal-hydride battery, and a CD-ROM drive. These systems are generally bigger and heavier than more expensive notebook PCs.

DVD-ROM drive. Mainstream notebooks tend to be larger and heavier than corporate notebooks and can have either fixed or swappable drives. Expect to pay between \$1,500 to \$2,000 for a laptop in this

or more for a notebook in this



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who needs high performance.

Best Buy, Computer Buyer's Guide, January 2001

"If you need great performance, excellent components, and lots of expandability, all at a great price, take a long look at the Nutrend Athlon Mega 2. This is a system we'd recommend for power users and serious gamers everywhere."

Best Buy, Computer Buyer's Guide, October 2000

"The Athlon Ultra's performance is blistering. Conventional business applications are child's play, while truly demanding software--which is to say, games--run with a commendable smoothness and ease."

Best Buy, Computer Buyer's Guide, May, August 2000



PCWORID January 2001 Athlon Ultra 2 October 2000 Athlon Special 2

Athlon Force 2: Top 15 Home PC, March 2001 Athlon Special 2: Top 10 Budget PC, March 2001 Duron Power 2: Top 10 Budget PC, December 2000 Business Athlon 1: Top 10 Midrange PC, February 2001

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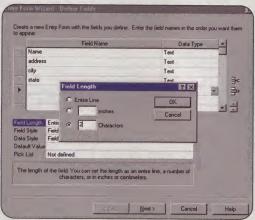
ASKSAM 4.0

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The \$149.95 askSam 4.0 expands the program's capabilities to support file sizes up to 16 terabytes and unlimited document sizes. AskSam can import more than a dozen file types, so you can search across almost any document. New wizards guide you through creating databases, importing files, and generating reports.

The built-in word processor lets you enter and edit data, complete with spellcheck and mail-merge capa-



bilities. Users can import Word, Excel, or email files, as well as index items, and perform searches without knowing programming or query languages. We imported a large Outlook e-mail file and were quickly able to find specific messages. New with version 4.0, askSam lets you use parentheses with Boolean operators.

Though askSam doesn't require forms, some data works better when it's structured. The new Entry Form wizard lets you quickly build data-entry forms, and allows you to have multiple forms in a file. You can have a single searchable database file of videotapes, audio CDs, and books, with separate entry forms for each.

To give more flexible analysis of your data, askSam has added advanced conditional and if/then logic features to its report builder. Users can start simply with askSam's quick-start guide. We liked the Quick Tour, a 10-screen

overview that gives the basics of using askSam. Files created with earlier versions can be opened and converted, so existing users won't lose their data.

Users of Access or Paradox may feel a little lost at the freedom from structure askSam allows, but with use, they should come to appreciate its flexibility. Though askSam 4.0 won't replace Oracle or SQL Server, it will help those wading through documents get more information from their data. -Jay Munro

TRUESPACE5

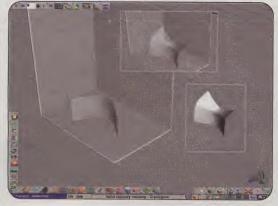
Add Some Space To 3D Graphics

READY TO EXPLORE 3D MODELING, BUT DON'T HAVE the budget of Pixar Animation Studios? Caligari Corp.'s \$795 trueSpace5 provides an entry point to the 3D-design realm for serious amateurs, and enough new features to warrant users of earlier versions to upgrade.

High-end features put trueSpace5 in the same league as many pro-

fessional-level modeling programs. Caligari implements the tools well, too: A shadow box surrounds the object, and curves projected on its walls control the contours in one or two dimensions. Adjust the curves, and the object sweeps along the new path in real time.

The program offers improved rendering realism, as well. A better radiosity algorithm



improves control over fill light in high-contrast environments. Manufacturing specs, such as type of element and temperature, deliver terrific results. Real-time display of mapped textures cuts design and animation time, and a 360-degree walkthrough of fully shaded, raytraced, and radiosity-computed geometry gives unparalleled feedback.

TrueSpace5 also addresses workflow issues. You can resize child viewports, and a new screen mode, 4-View, has a traditional four-window display. Icon menus are now dockable on any screen edge. Individual tools can be "torn out" of menus and combined

with others to create custom toolbars. All objects now reside in libraries, so loading them is a simple click or drag-and-drop away.

In addition, the program finally offers context-sensitive menus for any active object. Creation of multilayered shaders is faster,

because layers can be added, deleted, and hidden. Texture modeling is faster, too.

Upgraders will find trueSpace5's improvements compelling, and new buyers will get the most comprehensive toolbox available at this price. But this heavily icondriven interface is not for everyone. We suggest downloading the trial version before buying. -Rick Stevens

EDITORS' RATING 8.2 RATED I TO 10 BASIC DATABASE FUNCTIONS EASE OF USE PROGRAMMING VALUE Handles structured and unstructured data; quick search line; customizable searchresult window; easy file import Filenames lost in import, no Windows controls on forms; Filenames lost in import: no

> PRODUCT: askSam 4.0 COMPANY: askSam Systems 800-800-1997, 850-584-6590 www.asksam.com REQUIRES: 12MB hard drive

no navigation on right mouse

space; Windows 95, 98, Me, 2000, or NT

MFR. EST. PRICE: \$149.95



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EDITORS' RATING 7.3 RATED I TO 10

ANIMATION. EASE OF USE OUTPUT PRODUCTIVITY VALUE .

Intuitive onscreen tools; immediate visual feedback on textures; sophisticated radiosity renderer

Tiny icons difficult to see; interface is unique and not for everyone

PRODUCT: trueSpace5 COMPANY: Caligari Corp. Mountain View, CA 800-351-7620, 650-390-9600 www.caligari.com LIST PRICE: \$795:

\$499 (upgrade from version 2.0); \$399 (upgrade from version 3.0); \$299 (upgrade from version 4.0)



For real-time pricing, go to priceit.zdnet.com and enter number

SECTION CONTINUES ON PAGE 94

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Desktop model P3315T: Intel Pentium III processor 866MHz / Intel i815 chipset / 128MB SDRAM / 10GB HDD / 48X max CD-ROM / Intel Direct 3D integrated video / 3Com 10/100 integrated LAN / Windows 2000



\$1199

Corporate e-PC c-10

Model P2768T: Intel Pentium III processor 866MHz / Intel 810e chipset/ 128MB SDRAM / 10GB HDD / 24X max CD-ROM / Intel Integrated 3D Direct AGP video / 3Com 10/100 integrated LAN/Windows 2000



Vectra VL400

Desktop model P3720T: Intel Pentium III processor 933MHz/Intel i815 chipset/128MB SDRAM/15GB HDD/48X max CD-ROM/Intel Direct 3D integrated video/ 3Com 10/100 integrated LAN/Windows 98



\$1269





Vectra VL400

Desktop model P4150T: Intel Pentium III processor 1GHz/Intel i815 chipset/128MB SDRAM / 20GB HDD / 48X max CD-ROM / Intel Direct 3D integrated video / 3Com 10/100 integrated LAN / Windows 2000

\$1399°



Vectra VL400

Minitower model P4153T: Intel Pentium III processor 1GHz/Intel i815 chipset/ 128MB SDRAM / 20GB HDD / 48X max CD-ROM / Intel Direct 3D integrated video / 3Com 10/100 integrated LAN/Windows 2000

\$1419°



Vectra VL800

Desktop model P3631T: Intel Pentium 4 processor 1.4GHz / Intel i850 chipset / 128MB Rambus / 20GB HDD / 48X max CD-ROM / Matrox G450 dual-16MB video / 3Com 10/100 integrated LAN / Windows 2000

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EUDORA INTERNET SUITE 2.0

SOFTWARE K

You've Got Mail (On Your Palm)

ANDLING OUTGOING PALM E-MAIL CAN BE COnfusing, because you usually have to choose between synchronizing your messages to your desktop or sending messages directly from the Palm device. Qualcomm's new Eudora Internet Suite 2.0 lets you have it both ways for \$29.95.

That price allows you unlimited synchronization that's compatible with most desktop e-mail programs. You can also obtain a free version of the software, but it only works with desktop Eudora software in versions 4.3.2 or later. If you use any other client, you'll need to pony up.

A decent Web browser, EudoraWeb, accompanies the e-mail client. We tested the browser on an OmniSky wireless connection and found it connected a bit more reliably than OmniSky's own browser.

While Eudora's Palm e-mail program does not accept attachments, it does offer a richer filtering program than its competitors and a substantially better filtering feature than the one in the built-in Palm mail program. Most Palm e-mail programs can only accept or reject messages outright, while Eudora lets you filter messages to folders. You can also sort your list of messages by sender, subject, or date by simply tapping on the appropriate column heading, just as you would in a desktop e-mail program. Unfortunately, the program lacks a tool for searching the full text of messages.

The suite includes a program for synchro-

nizing messages to your desktop that is easier to configure than the standard Palm mail program. If you're exchanging messages through standard POP and SMTP connections, the setup process is a bit laborious, but no more so

than with any other POP e-mail client. However, the software lacks a method for archiving the messages you've sent. (It only has an automatic BCC setting.) The package does offer support for the SMTP AUTH protocol for added security in the event that your ISP requires it.

The mix of features in Eudora Internet Suite 2.0 doesn't promise everything to everyone, but it does give Palm users something they'll find useful.

-Bill Dyszel

EDITORS' RATING 5.8

RATED I TO 10

Filters messages to folders; sends mail through either POP server or desktop client;

No attachments; no searching; sent items not saved

Eudora Internet Suite 2.0

COMPANY: Qualcomm

www.eudora.com

San Diego, CA; 800-238-3672

MFR. EST. PRICE: \$29.95

ZD Net Price It!"

For real-time pricing, go to priceit.zdnet.com and enter number.

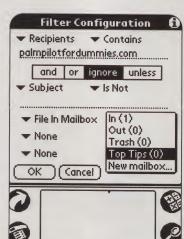
3 4 2 5 5

EASE OF USE

INSTALLATION

includes browser

FEATURES



OPERA 5

New Opera Hits All the Right Notes

HE "LITTLE BROWSER THAT COULD" STRIKES again. Starting life in 1996 as a footnote to the Windows browser wars, Opera 5 brings standards support, snappy performance, and some new features to the table. Opera 5 is available either as a no-cost, banner-supported version or an ad-free \$39 package.

Opera now offers support for major Web standards (HTML 4, XML, SSL, CSS, JavaScript, and DOM). The new integrated

search field lets you choose search engines and search from the URL line. Because your search is plugged into the URL automatically, you can also save searches as bookmarks. The new built-in e-mail client lets you have multiple accounts, import from Eudora and Outlook Express, create folders, and search your e-mail.

We liked Opera from the start, with its small footprint and quick download. Unlike both Netscape and Microsoft, Opera is refreshingly up-front about its download size—2MB for the browser, 9.5MB if you need Java VM. This includes the e-mail and newsreader clients.

Opera uses a multiple document interface (MDI), which opens multiple pages in a single window. To navigate between windows, you click on tabs on the window bar, similar to Windows 9x's Start menu bar.

We found Opera to be a speedy and capable alternative to Netscape and Internet Explorer, though some pages didn't render correctly due to incompatible JavaScript. That problem aside, Opera is a control freak's dream. Want to tweak the already well-organized interface? Check out the com-

prehensive Preferences. If even that's not enough, you can modify the OPERA.INI file as you see fit. We loved many of Opera's built-in features, such as the

transfer-status window that opens when you download one or more files.

Opera probably won't surpass IE or Navigator in the world's Web-browser popularity contest anytime soon. Even so, Opera 5 is a quick, compact alternative that's more than worth a look.

—Jay Munro





EASE OF USE 8
FEATURES 9
PROGRAMMING 8
STABILITY 6
VALUE 9

Small footprint; efficient e-mail client; view multiple

windows with easy navigation; monitor multiple downloads from a single window Not fully compatible with IE and Netscape JavaScript;

Not fully compatible with IE and Netscape JavaScript; no e-mail message-size limit; no size sort on newsgroup client

PRODUCT: Opera 5

COMPANY: Opera Software

Oslo, Norway 011-47-24-16-40-00

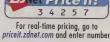
www.opera.com

version and for registered Opera 4.x users

Net Price If!

3 4 2 5 7

LIST PRICE: \$39 (standard purchase); free for ad-supported







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MAILSHELL



Get the Facts, Not the Spam

ITH THE PREPONDERANCE OF MAILING LISTS. newsletters, and e-zines on the Web, it's difficult to find the information you need. And once you do, how do you sign up and keep your in-box from overflowing with unwanted solicitations? Enter Mailshell, a free online solution to limit spam, cut down on mailing-list clutter, and maintain your

anonymity on the Web.

As a registered user (an e-mail address is all the firm asks for), you can take advantage of Mailshell's protections against spam and privacy invasions. You can even choose to play it close to the vest with a totally anonymous user profile and provide only the personal information you think is prudent. All e-mail messages are filtered through Mailshell's site, and you have the choice

mallshelf g lists = go C1 (00d) C2 C3 C4 C5 (great)

of leaving them on your 50MB of server space or forwarding them to your own e-mail account.

With its Yahoo-esque layout and 117,729 mailing lists, Mailshell's offerings may seem a tad overwhelming. But the site provides a detailed description of each mailing list to help you decide. You can view the listings by date, popularity, users' picks, or Mailshell's editors' picks. Each listing has its own information, with an at-a-glance breakdown, a blurb from the mailing-list author, and even a sample e-mail message. Many lists even include reviews from Mailshell editors. When you're ready, you can subscribe

to (or unsubscribe from) whole groups of lists at a

time, because much of the process is automated.

This wealth of information and high degree of customization comes at a price, however: The interface can get bogged down if you manage a large number of lists and the attendant messages. Still, the ease of subscribing, spam filtering, and privacy protections make a visit to Mailshell a necessity. Your in-box will thank you.

-Steven Abrams

EDITORS' RATING 7.0

RATED I TO 10

EASE OF USE ..

FEATURES
PERFORMANCE

SERVICE AND SUPPORT

Synchronizes all your PCs and handhelds

Difficult interface; limited server space

SERVICE: fusionOne COMPANY: fusionOne San Jose, CA; 408-282-1200

www.fusionone.com PRICE: Free

ZDNet Price It!

3 4 2 5 2

FUSIONONE

Getting in Sync With fusionOne

F YOU'RE FINDING IT INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO keep your work PC, home PC, and Palm device synchronized with your most current information, then fusionOne's Internet-based synchronization service may be right for you.

FusionOne takes the concept of syncing your handheld and your PC one step further, allowing you to synchronize your work PC and home PC, as well as your laptop and mobile phone. You'll even have an eDock, 25MB of server disk space to

keep your data synchronized via the Web.

Registration is free, as is the fusionOne software. The software installation is automated, but you have to repeat the setup for each device you want to sync. Currently, fusionOne supports PCs running Windows, Palm OS handhelds, and WAP-enabled cell phones. Support is in the works for the Mac OS, twoway pagers, Pocket PCs, and

dock virţyal 📵 office E 7000 Add new tro My Bookmarks O Name Description **新** 新 海 分 E THERE / T D Links ∠ □ Media 2 F (fusionone 1000 2 F T things Select All Delete [Today | Calendar | Contacts | Mail | Tasks | Notes | Files | Bookmarks | Logout]

Psion (EPOC) handhelds.

Outlook users will be able to keep the latest version of their calendar, notes, e-mail, and contacts synchronized between devices. You can also sync your browser's bookmarks, and even files or entire directories—which makes the 25MB of server space seem a bit too small.

If you're out with your handheld, you can synchronize it with your other devices from a cradle connected to any fusionOneenabled PC. Bear in mind, however, that the fusionOne software will replace the software you currently use to sync up your device.

FusionOne's software and the eDock

For real-time pricing, go to priceit.zdnet.com and enter number. interface aren't as intuitive as we'd hoped. If you're not careful, you can make serious mistakes that will affect all the data on every device you use. Backup or version control would be a nice addition.

Once you get comfortable with the interface, though, fusionOne is an easy solution to the problematic task of managing and updating the same information spread across a range of devices. -S.A.

Easy to subscribe and unsubscribe; many options to customize Options initially overwhelming; too many selections can bog down the interface SERVICE: Mailshell COMPANY: Mailshell.com Santa Clara, CA; 408-988-8194 www.mailshell.com PRICE: Free ZDNet Price It! 3 4 2 5 3 For real-time pricing, go to priceit.zdnet.com and enter number.

EDITORS' RATING 7.0

RATED I TO 10

EASE OF USE

VALUE

FEATURES
PERFORMANCE

SERVICE AND SUPPORT



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MECHWARRIOR 4: VENGEANCE

A Mech of a Good Time

EDITORS' RATING 8.8

Ithough it's been less than two years since the release of MechWarrior 3, MechWarrior 4:



Vengeance represents a mech-size step forward, with breathtaking graphics, excellent multiplayer support, and more than 30 single-play missions. Now battling under the Microsoft banner, MechWarrior 4 is, in fact, the first mech title developed by designers from FASA, the company that created the Battletech board game on which the series is based.

But while in a sense the game has returned to its roots, it departs in some significant ways from earlier installments. For starters, the game's graphics are absolutely superb. A configuration utility lets you select options that will maximize your system's frame rate, and owners of newer rigs with fast graphics cards are treated to beautiful terrain, detailed mechs, and spectacular explosions and weapon effects.

MechWarrior 4's expanded campaign, meanwhile, offers a good mix of offensive, defensive, and recon missions, all with varied objectives, though none of them is particularly difficult. Consequently, veterans might be disappointed with the campaign's ease, even

on the highest difficulty level.

The biggest change, however, is found in one of the MechWarrior series' prime attractions: the ability to design your own mech and test it against other players' creations in multiplayer combat. MechWarrior 4 restricts you to using certain weapons on different types of mechs. Still, players who accept this conceptual change will find MechWarrior 4 to be a superlative multiplayer experience.

Overall, MechWarrior 4 preserves the game's essential elements while making it easier for new players to get involved. It's a great introduction to the series for the uninitiated, but it has enough depth to keep mech aficionados engaged for a -Bruce Geryk

(Microsoft Corp.; \$44.99 34286) www.microsoft.com/games)

REALMYST

Almost the Real Thing

EDITORS' RATING 6.4

he game realMyst is a noble attempt by Cyan to update its pop-

THE LONGEST JOURNEY

War of the Worlds

EDITORS' RATING 9.3



Looking like a hybrid of classic Sierra and LucasArts adventure games, Funcom's

The Longest Journey is one of the best adventure games in years.

The Longest Journey stars a young woman named April Ryan, a visual-arts student living in a futuristic city who is plagued by



strange dreams that seem a bit too real. You soon discover that there are two different worlds: One, Stark, is devoted to science and technology, while the other, Arcadia, is devoted to magic. April has the rare ability to move, or "shift," between the two. But the division between the worlds is being eroded, and April is the only one who can restore the balance.

The plot follows the blueprint laid by the classics of the fantasy epic, but it's also an original story filled with interesting settings and people. The worlds are brought to life with rich, detailed graphics. The character models are good-looking and diverse, and the background scenery is colorful and varied. The sound is even better, with nonintrusive ambient music and excellent character voices.

The puzzles in The Longest Journey are fairly standard, though they improve as the game goes on. Still, it's the complex and intriguing story that really holds the game together. It deepens as you progress, and you'll still be thinking about all the subplots and how they tie together long after you've finished playing. The only criticism that can be leveled at the conclusion is that it doesn't wrap everything up. Still, it does allude to a possible sequel—a happy prospect for anyone who plays the game.

(Funcom; \$39.99 (1428) www.funcom.com)

-Ron Dulin

ular adventure game Myst. The title implies that this is the "real" version of Myst, the one the Rand brothers would have originally created years ago had the

technology been available.

For the most part, realMyst is identical to the original game; both the puzzles and the books are the same. The difference is a new 3D engine, which not only lets you move through the environments, but also allows for the inclusion of animation in otherwise static surroundings.

Unfortunately, the benefits of the new engine are limited to the visuals. The controls require you to use the arrow keys or the mouse to move about. Trying to manipulate objects in the world using your mouse often makes you move instead, and turning is a complete nightmare.

The other problem is that the engine runs slowly, and the puzzles suffer as a result. Some timed puzzles that were originally just mind-benders are now sadistic battles between you and your keyboard. Even simple point-and-click puzzles have become tedious in this version.

With some serious tweaks to the engine, realMyst would serve as a timely reminder that the original was an impressive game that was defined by both its fascinating detail and its original story. In its current form, however, realMyst serves only as a novelty for fans of the original who want to see the new epilogue. -R.D. (The Learning Co.; \$29.95 (34285) www.learningco.com)

00000 = 70 Net Price It!

For real-time pricing, go to priceit.zdnet.com and enter number.

AMERICAN MCGEE'S ALICE

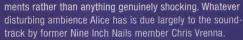
Mad About You

EDITORS' RATING 7.3

t's no secret that Lewis Carroll's classic children's books, Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass, have a subtext of insanity and violence. Since 1907. rating on the story's darker elements. Now, PC gamers have their own vision of this timeless tale. But while American McGee's Alice is polished and often looks terrific,

it's undermined by straightforward, uninspired gameplay overall appeal

Powered by id Software's Quake III engine, the game's full 3D depiction of Wonderland is clearly its best feature. Most levels are meticulously rendered and highly original, though they tend to depend on dimly lit, surrealistic environ-



Despite its top-notch visuals, however, Alice unravels in the gameplay. It's a pure third-person shooter without any of the exploration elements traditionally found in the best 3D games. The camera lags slightly behind Alice, as if it's always trying to catch up to your mouse movements, but your view never gets obscured, even when Alice's back is to a wall.

Alice is a fairly standard shooter wrapped in a very attractive package. It offers neither the complexity of a non-

a first-rate shooter. The game also lacks multiplayer support, and you won't find any additional challenges to keep you involved after you've finished the main quest. American McGee's Alice certainly looks good, but while you'll undoubtedly enjoy the game's imaginative artwork, you may be disappointed by its too-conventional under--Erik Wolpaw

(Electronic Arts; \$39.95

www.ea.com)





Its price doesn't affect its sense of self-worth.

hp brio business pc

Model P3674T: Intel® Celeron™ processor 733 MHz / 128 MB SDRAM / 20 GB HD / 48x max CD-ROM / HP 10/100 PCI LAN card / Windows® 2000 HP recommends Windows 2000 Professional for business





BUDGET PCs

These four

sub-\$1,000 systems

save you money

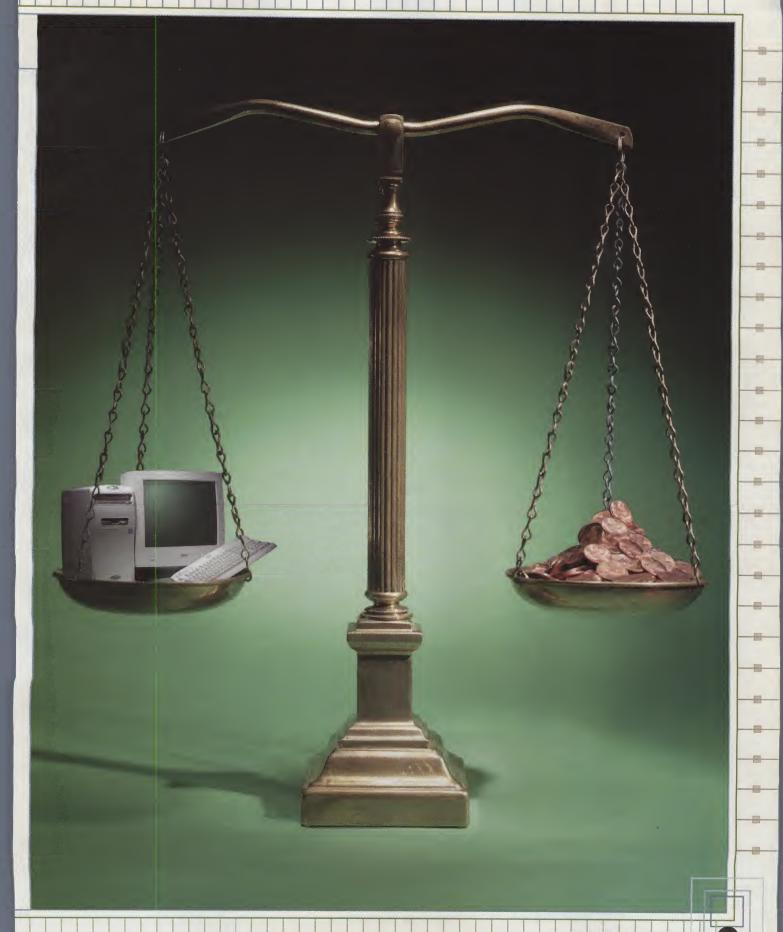
without making

you pay for it in

the long run.

When the sub-\$1,000 desktop PC debuted about four years ago, it was more of a marketing tool than a viable alternative to higher-cost systems. These early "hot deals" typically left buyers cold with outdated (and often mismatched) components, and application performance well below that of most nonbudget PCs. But that changed rapidly with the arrival of better system configurations and powerful, low-price CPUs such as Intel's Celeron and AMD's K6 and K6-2. By the end of 1999, the under-\$1,000 category established itself as the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. PC industry, having proven immensely popular with both consumers and business buyers alike.

INTRODUCTION BY STEVE SCHWARTZ - REVIEWS BY RICK BROIDA



news | best buys | opinions | reviews | features | web buyer | business buyer | help & how-to | reference

Sub-\$1,000 Desktops **Category Tested Price Range** \$949 to \$999 Minimum Configuration 866MHz processor; 128MB RAM; 20GB hard drive; 17-inch monitor; 48x CD-ROM drive (or DVD-ROM); Windows Me **Companies Included** ABS Computer Technologies, Dell Computer Corp., NuTrend Computer, Tiny Computers **ABS AMD Web Special**

Although PC prices in general have steadily declined over the last few years, the under-\$1,000 price point continues to be a popular draw for many first-time PC buyers as well as experienced users seeking a second or third home system. The pace of progress has helped as well. The current generation of budget PCs packs more sys-

BUDGET PCs

tem memory, larger hard drives and monitors, better graphics performance, and faster CD-ROM drives (and even DVD-ROM drives) than the models of just two years ago. Of course, as is

the case with any budget item, buying a sub-\$1,000 PC involves some compromises.

Some still come with a skimpy 32MB of RAM. Others lack room for expansion and may include some second-string components, usually monitors, graphics accelerators, and speakers. Still, save for multimedia enthusiasts, graphics professionals, and

ardent gamers, many buyers will find these trade-offs acceptable.

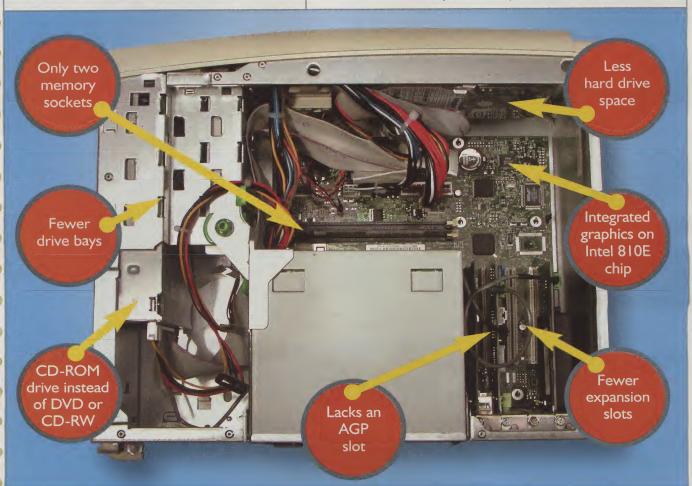
On the whole, the four sub-\$1,000 systems we look at this month—the ABS AMD Web Special, Dell

> Dimension L866, NuTrend Athlon Special, and Tiny Value Select 900-A-don't demand many compromises. All four are based on

either a Pentium III or AMD Athlon CPU running at 866MHz or faster. Three of the four have hardy graphics subsystems, three

Although all four systems in this roundup are at the high end of the sub-\$1,000 category-and are somewhat atypical of budget PCs in their features and configurations—this photo illustrates some of the ways a budget PC's design may differ from that of its more upscale counterparts.

ABS AMD Web Special



BUDGET PCs

have ample expansion space, and one even comes with a three-piece Altec Lansing sound system. All four systems also come with 128MB of system memory and Windows Me installed, which provided surprisingly fast boot times (about half as long as required by most Windows 98 PCs).

Despite the similarities, we found some differences among these four systems that could easily tip the scales of any purchase decision. Suffice it to say, there's more to a budget PC than price alone.

ABS AMD WEB SPECIAL

EDITORS' RATING 8.2	
EASE OF USE9	PERFORMANCE 8 SERVICE AND SUPPORT 7 VALUE 9

PROS: Leading-edge graphics card; three-piece speaker system; fast, spacious hard drive; stylish case; three-ring binder for manuals and CDs

CONS: Loud fans; cumbersome volume-control design; little bundled

BEST

Right from the start, the ABS AMD Web Special makes a good impression. The stylish gray faceplate on the full-size

tower nicely offsets the off-white case. The system's full complement of expansion ports is not only labeled with icons, but with text descriptors as well (as all computers should be). And its colorful quick-start poster effectively illustrates all the necessary connections-including optional components such as scanners and printers. We particularly liked the sturdy three-ring binder that houses the system manual, the recovery CD, and other documents and discs.

Our fondness for the Web Special goes beyond mere aesthetics, though. The sys-

tem features some of the best hardware in the group, including a GeForce2 MX graphics card with enough 3D horsepower to satisfy all but the most demanding gamers. Other standout components include an Ethernet adapter, a 16x DVD-ROM drive with one of the best movieplayer utilities we've seen (Leadtek's WinFast DVD), a three-piece speaker system from Altec Lansing, and a Microsoft Internet Keyboard with 10 convenient buttons for navigating Web pages and accessing Windows applications.

Not surprisingly, the Web Special consistently ranked near the top of the pack in benchmark performance. It easily blew away the competition on 3D WinMark 2000, with scores more than twice those of some of the other machines we reviewed. Credit for that goes to the Leadtek nVidia GeForce2 MX card, which also provides dual-monitor support. You can connect a second monitor and run, say, your word processor on one and a Web browser on another.

ABS supplies one monitor, the ADI MicroScan M700, a decent CRT that looks relatively sharp all the way up to 1,280x1,024. We saw a slight pinching effect along the left side of the screen, but otherwise the monitor earned high marks. Skip using its built-in speakers, however. They lack volume controls and sound nowhere near as good as the included Altec Lansing ACS33 speaker system. The group's only

f you must skimp on components, try to skimp on things that you can upgrade later on:

Memory

You can opt for less memory, but make sure you can add more modules later without having to replace the ones you have.

Drive capacity

You can always add a larger hard drive laterprobably for less money per megabyte.

Optical drives

It's convenient to have both a CD-ROM or DVD-ROM drive and a CD-RW drive. But you can add a second drive later on, or upgrade the drive in your system.

Sound card and graphics card

A separate sound card or graphics card often has advantages over sound or graphics that are built into the motherboard. If the system lets you turn off the motherboard-based features, you can add either card later.

You may never need either of these things, but consider them before buying:

IEEE 1394 (FireWire)

You probably didn't buy your sub-\$1,000 system with digital-video editing in mind, but you never know when the DV bug will bite. Fortunately, you can always add IEEE 1394 capability by way of a PCI expansion card at some later date. Most of these add-in boards sell for between \$50 and \$70.

Many, if not most, inexpensive systems come with WinModems—modems that work only under Windows, relying on the system processor for modem functions. WinModems are severely limited, and it's better to avoid them in favor of a real modem

M. David Stone



COMPUTER SHOPPER BENCHMARKS>

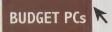
	ABS AMD Web Special BUY	Dell Dimension L866	NuTrend Athlon Special	Tiny Value Select 900-A
PROCESSOR	900MHz Athlon	866MHz Pentium III	1.1GHz Athlon	900MHz Athlon
SYSTEM MEMORY	128MB SDRAM	128MB SDRAM	128MB SDRAM	128MB SDRAM
 APPLICATION PERFORMANCE Business Winstone 2001 Content Creation Winstone 2001	32.1 32.6	32.9 29.2	34.6 35.1	32.6 33.9
GRAPHICS SUBSYSTEM Business Graphics WinMark 99	370	129	278	243
3D WinMark 2000 (1,024x768 @ 16-Bit Color)	91.9	7.2	34.6	30.5
3D WinMark 2000 (1,024x768 @ 32-Bit Color)	68.6	NA	18.4	15.9
Quake III Arena (Frames per Second) (800x600 @ 16-Bit Color)	94.9	26.5	38.5	29.9
DISK SUBSYSTEM Business Disk WinMark 99	6,120	6,050	6,280	5,110
NA = Not applicable All tests run at 1,024x768 and 32-bit	color at an 85Hz refresh	rate except where no		ORES ARE BETTER

For expanded coverage, go to our Reviews Hub at

news | best buys | opinions | reviews | features | web buyer | business buyer | help & how-to | reference

satellite-subwoofer system, the ACS33 also makes the Web Special the best-sounding system reviewed here. We wish the speakers had more power and a headphone jack, but we can't fault their crystal-clear

The Web Special also has a few minor blemishes. First, the internal fans are extremely loud, to the extent that you have to crank up the speakers an extra notch to hear music or other audio over them.



Second, the volume-control wheel on the right satellite speaker is difficult to turn and confusingly labeled. Finally, the only software to ship with the Web Special is Corel WordPerfect Office 2000, a good suite of business applications, but obviously not the best choice for Microsoft Office users. Still, those are pretty mild complaints. In the AMD **Dell Dimension L866** Web Special, ABS has

able system that doesn't feel in the least like a bargain-basement closeout. Indeed, it feels like a steal that you'd do well to consider even if you're not on a budget.

DELL DIMENSION L866

EDITORS' RATING 6.7		
EASE OF USE	8	PERFORMANCE 5 SERVICE AND SUPPORT 9 VALUE 7
PROS. First-rate monitor:	compact	tool-free tower case: excellent

software bundle; one year of free Internet service; solid documenta-tion; clever troubleshooting features

CONS: Poor graphics performance; no DVD drive; mediocre speakers; limited expansion room

ost systems priced under \$1,000 force you to accept a few trade-offs. The Dell Dimension L866, for instance, showers you with Pentium III performance, a splendid monitor, loads of good (continued on page 108)

1	F	F	Δ	T	11	R	F	٢	n	M	P	Δ	R	1 4	?	n	N	>	

	ABS AMD Web Special BEST	Dell Dimension L866	NuTrend Athlon Special	Tiny Value Select 900-A
DIRECT PRICE	\$999	\$949	\$999	\$988
CONFIGURATION				
Processor	900MHz AMD Athlon	866MHz Intel Pentium III	1.1GHz AMD Athlon	900MHz AMD Athlon
nstalled RAM	128MB SDRAM	128MB SDRAM	128MB SDRAM	128MB SDRAM
Maximum RAM	1.5GB	512MB	1.5GB	1GB
nstalled L2 Cache	256K	256K	256K	256K
Notherboard	Gigabyte GA-7ZX-1	Intel CA810E	Gigabyte GA-7ZX-1	Micro-Star MS-6340
Chipset	Via KT133	Intel 810E	Via KT133	Via KT133
Hard Drive	Maxtor 53073H6	Maxtor 52049H3	Maxtor 53073H6	Maxtor 52049U4
Hard Drive Capacity	30GB	20GB	30GB	20GB
Hard Drive Rotation Speed (rpm)	7,200	7,200	7,200	7,200
AGP Slot	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Graphics Card	Leadtek nVidia GeForce2 MX	Intel integrated 810E video	Leadtek nVidia Riva TNT2 M64	Leadtek nVidia Riva TNT2 M64
Graphics Chipset	nVidia GeForce2 MX	Intel 810E	nVidia Riva TNT2 M64	nVidia Riva TNT2 M64
Graphics Memory	32MB SDRAM	4MB shared system SDRAM	32MB SDRAM	32MB SDRAM
S-Video Out	Yes	No	No	No
17-Inch Monitor	ADI MicroScan M700	Dell E770	ADI MicroScan M700	Goldstar 17N
	0.27mm	0.28mm	0.27mm	0.28mm
Monitor Dot Pitch			1,280x1,024	1,280x1,024
Maximum Resolution	1,280x1,024	1,024x768	NA	48x
CD-ROM Drive Speed	NA (40)	48x		NA
OVD-ROM Drive Speed	16x (40x-max CD read)	NA	16x (40x-max CD read)	Creative Labs Sound Blaster
Sound Card	Creative Labs Sound Blaster PCI128	Creative Labs Sound Blaster PCI64V	Creative Labs Sound Blaster PCI128	128 (integrated)
Speaker System	Altec Lansing ACS33	Harman Kardon HK19.5	Generic	Tiny CPR50
Number of Speakers	Three (with subwoofer)	Two	Two	Two
Modem	Zoom Telephonics 2925L PCI	Conexant PCI Data/Fax Modem	Zoom Telephonics 2925L PCI	HAMR56
Ethernet Adapter	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
nstalled OS	Windows Me	Windows Me	Windows Me	Windows Me
CASE				
PCI Slots (Total/Available)	5/2	4/1	5/2	3/1
5.25-Inch Front-Accessible Bays	3/2	1/0	3/2	2/1
(Total/Available)				
3.5-Inch Front-Accessible Bays (Total/Available)	2/1	2/1	2/1	1/0
3.5-Inch Internal Bays	2/1	1/0	2/1	2/1
(Total/Available)				
Power-Supply Wattage	300	145	300	235
Dimensions (HWD, Inches)	17x8x19	15.5x6.4x13.4	17x8x19	14x7.3x17
SOFTWARE INCLUDED	Corel WordPerfect Office 2000	Microsoft Works Suite 2001 with Money 2001, Norton AntiVirus 2001, Dell Jukebox	Corel WordPerfect Office 2000	Microsoft Works 2000, Family Gan Pack, MGI PhotoSuite III, PC-cillin, SecondChance
SERVICE AND SUPPORT		- CON CONTROL OF THE		
Standard Warranty (Parts)	Three years*	Three years**	Three years*	One year
Standard Onsite Coverage	None	One year	None	None
Who Pays Shipping Costs Under Warranty	Customer pays one way	Company	Customer pays one way	Company (first year), 50/50 split afterwards
Extended Coverage Available	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Optional Onsite Plans	One year (\$29) or three years (\$129)	Two additional years for \$119	One year (\$29) or three years (\$129)	Gold Plan (three years for \$99)
Online Technical Support	Yes***	Yes	Yes***	Yes
Toll-Free Technical Support	Yes	Yes	Yes	No (available with Gold Plan)
Technical-Support Hours (ET)	11:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. M-F	24 hours daily	11:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. M-F	24 hours daily
NA = Not applicable	* = With lifetime technical support	** = Includes next-business-day service	*** = Provided by third party	A

Achieve balance

Whether you are updating your old system or buying a new one, CDW has all the tools to help you achieve the power, as well as the performance you need. At CDW, we custom configure your system according to your business requirements, so when it arrives, all you have to do is plug it in and work away. Start saving time and productivity by calling CDW today.



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Ideal for any environment. the IBM x230 tower server gives you the flexibility you need, without hindering performance.

- ▶ 1GHz Intel® Pentium® III processor
- ▶ 256KB Level 2 cache
- RAM: 128MB std., 4GB max.
- ▶ 40X Max CD-ROM drive
- ▶ 10/100 Ethernet

\$2788.41 CDW 249725





hp e-pc Series

Packed with powerful PC technology, yet one-fifth the size of a traditional desktop PC, the hp e-pc Series desktop computer is smaller, more simple and reliable.

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- ▶ RAM: 128MB ▶ 10GB hard drive
- ▶ 24X Max CD-ROM drive
- ▶ 10/100 Ethernet ▶ Windows® 98

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AMERICAN POWER CONVERSION

Smart-UPS 1400 APC Smart-UPS 1400, with

included PowerChute® software, will automatically save data and shut down your computer in the event of a power outage or brownout.

- Capacity: 1400VA, 950 Watts 6-outlets (NEMA 5-15)
- Typical run time: 24 minutes half load, 7.4 minutes full load ▶ Site-wiring fault indicator ▶ Full-time Surge Suppression and Noise Isolation ▶ CellGuard, Intelligent Battery Management Duser replaceable, hot-swappable batteries

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LEXMARK.

Optra T614n

Network-ready, with a 200MHz processor, the Lexmark Optra T614n printer delivers quick, high-quality results.

- ▶ Resolution: 1200 x 1200 dpi ▶ Print speed: 25 ppm
- ▶ RAM: 16MB std., 384MB max. ▶ Printer languages: PostScript Level 3 and HP PCL® 6 ▶ Paper handling: 500-sheet input tray, 100-sheet multipurpose tray
- ▶ Integrated 10/100BASE-TX network interface card

\$1768.76 CDW 223346





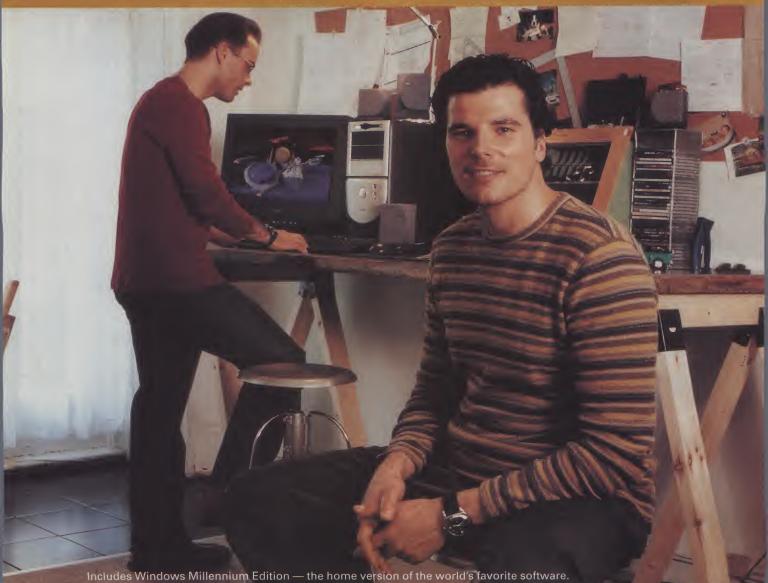
800-726-4239

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"Telephone access (call your phone co. for details) and other surcharges for access may apply. Must register within 30 days of receiving computer and accept DellNet/MSN Terms of Service. You agree to be billed monthly fees after the initial service period. You may cancel service at any time. Offer valid for new customers only in U.S. households and must be given 18 years old with major credit card. Limited time offer, / Prices, specifications, availability and terms of offers may change without notice. Taxes and shipping charges extra, and vary. Valid for U.S. Dell Home Systems Co. only. For a copy of our Guarantees or Limited Warrantees, write Dell USA L.P. Attn: Warrantees, One Dell Way, Round Rock, Texas 78682. 'Akt-Home or On-site service provided via third-party contract with customer. To receive Next-Business-Day service, Dell must notify the service provider before 5 pm (customer's time). Availability varies. Other conditions apply. For hard drives, 65 means 1 billion bytes; accessible capacity varies with operating environment. 'Download speeds are less fabout 30kbps) and vary by modem manufacturer and line conditions. Analog phone hased transparent required. 'Software, packaging, or documentation may differ from retained sheat depths and coupons, call 800-728-9865 for IPA Systems and monitor purchase may be required to rebate. Intel Inside logs and Pentium are registered trademarks of Intel Corporation. Ms. Microsoft, MSN and Windows are registered trademarks of Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.





The Dell™ Dimension™ 8100 takes you to the next level and then some. We're talking speeds of up to 1.5GHz maximized by the latest Intel® Pentium® 4 processors. With up to 1GB of memory, you can multi-task without sacrificing performance. Arming you with quite possibly the fastest and most powerful desktop you've ever seen is just one more way Dell helps you get the most out of your PC. No matter how extreme your needs are.

DELL™ DESKTOPS:

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Cutting-Edge Technology

- Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor at 1.3GHz
- 128MB RDRAM
- 20GB⁵ Ultra ATA/100 Hard Drive (7200 RPM)
- 19" (18.0" vis, .26dp) M991 Monitor
- NEW 32MB NVIDIA™ GeForce2 MX 4X AGP Graphics
- 48X Max CD-ROM Drive
- SB Live! Value Digital
- harman/kardon® Speakers
- 56K Capable® PCI Telephony Modem for Windows®
- Integrated 3Com® 10/100 Ethernet Controller
- MS* Works Suite 2001 MS* Windows* Me
- 3-Yr Limited Warranty² 1-Yr At-Home Service⁴
- 1 Year of DellNet[™] by MSN[®] Internet Access¹⁰ Included
- APC Pro8T2 SurgeArrest Surge Protector

\$1599 © E-VALUE CODE 05975-500315b ASK US ABOUT NO PAYMENTS FOR 90 DAYS.

DELL DIMENSION 8100 Series

Turbo-Charged PC

- Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor at 1.4GHz
- 128MB RDRAM
- 60GB⁵ Ultra ATA/100 Hard Drive (7200 RPM)
- 19" (18.0" vis, .26dp) M991 Monitor
- 32MB DDR NVIDIA™ GeForce2 GTS **4X AGP Graphics**
- NEW 16X Max DVD-ROM Drive
- Turtle Beach® Santa Cruz™ DSP Sound
- Harman Kardon® HK-695 Surround Sound Speakers with Subwoofer
- 56K Capable PCI Telephony Modem for Windows®
- Integrated 3Com® 10/100 Ethernet Controller
- MS° Works Suite 2001 MS° Windows° Me ■ 3-Yr Limited Warranty² ■ 1-Yr At-Home Service⁴
- 1 Year of DellNet[™] by MSN[®] Internet
- Access¹⁰ Included
- APC Pro8T2 SurgeArrest Surge Protector

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SOFTWARE & ACCESSORIES

Printers:

- Epson® Stylus 777 Color Printer, add \$99
- HP® DeskJet® 932C, add \$99 after \$50 HP® Mail-in Rebate® (Reg. \$149)

Scanner:

■ HP® ScanJet® 4300Cse, add \$99 after \$50 HP® Mail-in Rebate38 (Reg. \$149)

Power Protection:

■ APC Pro8T2 SurgeArrest Surge Protector, add \$39

Software:

- Extreme Game Pack (Dimension[™] only)¹⁶, add \$99
- Family Game Pack¹6, add \$99

Camera:

■ HP® C315 Digital Camera, add \$249 after \$50 HP* Mail-in Rebate³⁸ (Reg. \$299)



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(continued from page 104)

software, a free year of Internet service, and Dell's venerable service and support—all for \$949. In return, though, you must be willing to sacrifice strong video performance, a DVD-ROM drive, and system expandability.

Though outfitted with 128MB of SDRAM, the Dimension allots 4MB of it to the graphics-acceleration capabilities of the integrated Intel 810E chipset. (It is possible to disable the onboard video in favor of a PCI graphics card, but the system manual barely discusses it.) Though the system performed well on most of our benchmark tests, it turned in dismal 3D WinMark 2000 scores, and was unable to run the 32-bit-color portion of the test. Fortunately, the Dimension still soars through graphics-intensive games such as Quake III Arena, even managing 26.5 frames per second on our test.

The admirably compact tower case stands a few inches shorter than most and only about two-thirds as deep. It's also easy to open, thanks to a pop-off panel that's just as quick to replace as it is to remove. Alas, your expansion options are limited, with only a single 3.5-inch drive bay and one PCI slot available. Should you care to add a CD-RW or DVD-ROM drive, for example, you'd need to choose an external model or replace the existing 48x CD-ROM. Expansion-minded shoppers should also be aware that the Dimension has only one serial port.

Dell's E770 monitor is a rare find in a budget-PC configuration, delivering vibrant color and a sharp picture. At a resolution of 800x600, the 17-inch tube looks absolutely stellar; at 1,024x768, it's above

average, though text looks a bit fuzzy at smaller sizes. A pair of Harman Kardon speakers provides audio for the Dimension; they sound slightly flat and don't get very loud, but they do offer one nice perk: a headphone jack.

headphone jack.

Dell stocks the Dimension with a
healthy amount of software, including
Microsoft Works Suite 2001, Norton
AntiVirus 2001, and several utilities and
tutorials. The system also comes with one
year of free Internet service, courtesy of

BUDGET PCs 🔭

DellNet, an MSN offshoot.

The company also earns points for its effectively illustrated setup poster and extensive reference/troubleshooting manual. Setup couldn't be much simpler, thanks to color-coded plugs and ports. Also, on the rear of the case, a bank of four LEDs helps diagnose system problems ranging from the BIOS to the USB ports—an excellent innovation on Dell's part.

For budget-PC buyers who don't need DVD and place a low priority on games and audio, the Dimension L866 ranks as a fine choice. It doesn't have top-notch graphics and expansion features, but it's a well-designed and desirable machine.

NUTREND ATHLON SPECIAL

PROS: Fast 1.1GHz Athion CPU; fast, large hard drive; excellent keyboard; three-ring binder for manuals and CDs; ample expansion room CONS: Awful speakers; lacks Ethernet adapter; skimpy software bundle; possible reliability issues

erhaps the fastest PC you can buy for under \$1,000, the NuTrend Athlon Special belongs on every CPU speed freak's short list. It's highly expandable and loaded with good components, although it lacks Ethernet support and

has some potential reliability issues.

In terms of raw processing power, the NuTrend led the pack with its 1.1GHz AMD Athlon CPU. It's won-

derful to find such a state-of-the-art processor in a budget-price system, especially when combined with a 30GB hard drive and a 16x DVD-ROM drive. The NuTrend also logged

the group's highest scores on many benchmark tests. And though its 3D WinMark 2000 scores were a distant second to the ABS system, games and graphics applications ran without a hitch.

The system comes with Microsoft's splendid Internet Keyboard, which has 10 Web-navigation and system-operation buttons, and ADI's decent MicroScan M700

SHOPPING TIPS

What hardware is included?

Make sure that eye-catching price is for a complete system, including the monitor, modem, and other essentials.

What's the operating system?

Most budget PCs currently come with Windows 98 Second Edition or Me installed. You might also run into systems with Linux. Make sure you're getting the operating system you want.

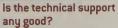
Is there bundled software?

There may not be any, or it may not be what you need. For instance, Microsoft Office Small Business doesn't offer Access, PowerPoint, FrontPage, or PhotoDraw, which Office Premium does. If you'll need to buy software for a given system, be sure to consider that additional cost as part of the price.

Who provides technical support?

Find out who supports the system and for how long, whether there's a toll-free line

for support calls, whether onsite service is included (or available as an option), and whether support is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



If support comes from a little-known vendor, check out the quality of the support before you buy. Explore the support

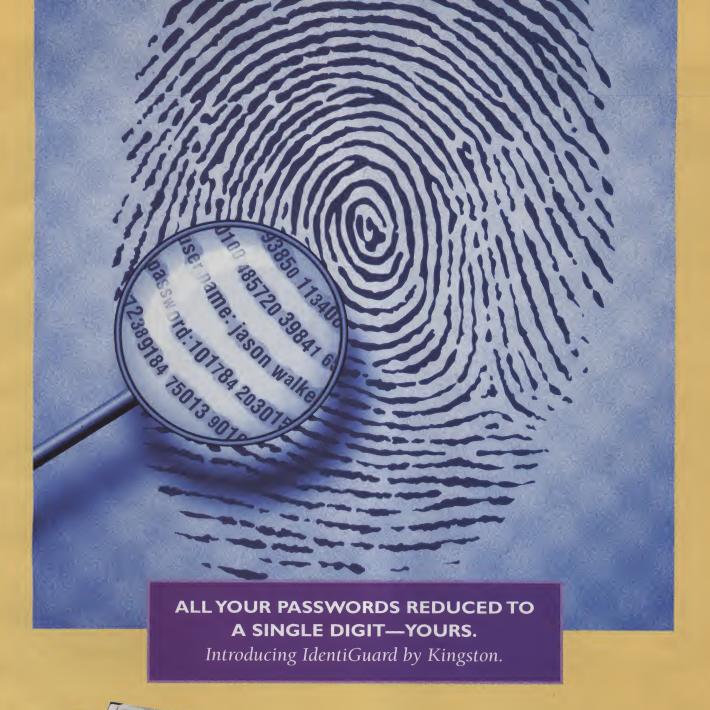
options on the vendor's Web site. Look for online documentation, a searchable set of FAQs or fixes, a way to search for specific information, a library of driver and BIOS updates, and a way to contact technical support. Also post questions on hardware forums asking if anyone has had any experience with the particular vendor.

Is there a restocking fee?

If the system turns out to be a disappointment, you may have to pay for the privilege of returning it. If you have doubts about whether a system will meet your needs, and a sales representative insists that it will, try to get a written commitment to waive the restocking fee if you have to return it.

-M.D.S.





The Kingston® IdentiGuard Puts all your passwords at your fingertip. From websites to networks, remembering all your passwords can be a brain twisting challenge. By tying all of your passwords to your unique fingerprint, the need to remember passwords is eliminated. Now, your finger is the only digit you'll need. Kingston's IdentiGuard is available in a Type II PC Card or USB form factor and is 100% tested for compatibility with today's leading systems. For more information on how IdentiGuard simplifies password management, call a Kingston representative today at (800) 337-7027 or visit www.kingston.com/identiguard.















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monitor. It also includes a smart three-ring binder that stores the system manuals and software in color-coded plastic sleeves. The comprehensive, illustrated quick-start poster should have novices up and running in short order.

Stocked with the same Leadtek nVidia Riva TNT2 M64 graphics card found in the Tiny Value Select 900-A, the Athlon Special handles graphics-intensive games and DVD movies with aplomb. (NuTrend supplies the very capable WinDVD MPEG-2 player software for the latter.) The only significant item the machine lacks is an Ethernet adapter. Fortunately, it has ample room for expansion in its spacious tower case, with a total of five PCI slots and five front-accessible drive bays.

The system's most obvious flaw is its generic stereo speakers. Tethered together by a 3-foot wire—barely long enough to let them sit on either side of the monitor—these speakers rob music of any depth and richness that it may have originally had. While they're reasonably loud and acceptable for dialog-heavy movies, these speakers were clearly the group's worst-sounding. You're almost better off using the speakers built into the ADI monitor—though not quite. NuTrend does supply one audio perk: an omnidirectional boom-style microphone that can stand on your desk or mount on your monitor.

NuTrend's single software offering, Corel

BUDGET PCs

WordPerfect Office 2000, provides all the essential business applications, but it's overkill for most home users and not terribly useful for those already entrenched in that other, ubiquitous office suite.

More worrisome, we ran into some reliability issues with the Athlon Special. Our first review system was dead on arrival, and its replacement had a defective DVD-ROM drive. We have no complaints about NuTrend's efforts to rectify the problems, but clearly this sort of inconvenience can try one's patience. Still, the bottom line remains unchanged: This is a fully loaded screamer at a truly amazing price.

TINY VALUE SELECT 900-A

EDITORS' RATING 6.3 DESIGN 7 PERFORMANCE 6 EASE OF USE 7 SERVICE AND SUPPORT 7 FEATURES 5 VALUE 7

PROS: Good software bundle; smart placement of power and reset buttons; programmable keyboard; easy to set up CONS: No DVD drive; mediocre monitor and speakers

n the past, Tiny Computers has wowed us by constructing feature-packed systems at exceptionally low prices. But the company's latest effort, the Value Select

900-A, seems unremarkable compared with some of the other machines reviewed here.

That's not to say this 900MHz Athlon-based PC lacks merit. It's an appreciably easy system to set up, thanks to a crackerjack quick-start poster that uses color photographs instead of illustrations and covers everything you need to know—

Tiny Value Select 900-A even USB- and game-peripheral connec-

tions. Color-coding of the cables and jacks simplifies installation, but we wish the system manual had an index.

The Tiny tower case stands a bit shorter than most, but it still has some room for expansion, with one open PCI slot and one empty 5.25-inch drive bay. What's more, its power and reset buttons reside where you can easily access them: on the rounded topfront edge. (Other case builders should take note of this smart design touch.) At the rear, you'll find the usual array of expansion ports and an Ethernet adapter.

Aside from the nVidia TNT2-based graphics board, the 900-A's other

THE 4 MOST COST-EFFECTIVE UPGRADES

	Minimums	Upgrades	Upgrade Costs	Benefits	Bottom Line
Memory	Some systems have only 32MB or 64MB of RAM, but you'd be far better off with 128MB.	You generally get the best bang for the buck with 128MB of RAM.	Expect to pay \$30 to \$40 for each 32MB.	More memory lets you switch quickly between programs when multiple applications are open.	Adding memory is the single most cost-effective way to improve performance.
Hard Drive	A 10GB hard drive today costs well under \$100. This should be the minimum-size drive for any budget system.	A 10GB drive is big enough for most purposes. Performance (like a faster spin rate) is more important than capacity in an upgrade for most users.	At 10GB, a 7,200-rpm drive can cost as little as \$25 more than a 5,400-rpm drive. If you're willing to sacrifice speed for capacity, you can get a 20GB or 30GB drive for a similarly small bump in price.	Faster drives take less time to load and save files. Larger drives let you store more files before you have to archive the files to free up disk space.	Drive speed is a key factor in overall perceived performance, which makes a fast hard drive one of the simplest ways to improve a system.
Monitor	Base systems often include 15-inch monitors suitable for only SVGA resolution.	A better choice is a 17-inch monitor for 1,024x768 resolution. Even better is a 19-inch model capable of 1,280x1,024.	Expect to pay about \$50 extra for a 17-inch monitor or an extra \$150 or more for a 19-inch monitor.	A higher resolution on a large screen displays more information at once—more pages, worksheet cells, or open Windows.	Being able to work with more data at once improves efficiency and ease of use.
Optical Drive (CD, CD-RW)	It's hard to find a system with anything less than a 40x CD-ROM drive.	Consider a CD-RW drive instead of, or in addition to, a CD-ROM drive. Insist on at least a 24x read speed.	The majority of CD-RW drives cost \$170 to \$250.	Aside from letting you create or copy audio and data CDs, a CD-RW drive will let you back up your data—a critical need for any system.	Having backups can be invaluable when you need them, and a CD-RW drive is an easy way to add substantial backup capability to your system.

The Shipshape System 4 ESSENTIAL ZDNET DOWNLOADS MemMonster 2001 (Win 9x/Me) Free up real memory. **Perfect Companion** Clean invalid keys from your Registry. Push the Freakin' Button Automatically dismiss pesky dialog boxes. Customize the Windows user interface. Met DOWNLOAD THEM NOW FROM computershopper.zdnet.com/downloads

components-a 48x CD-ROM drive, a 20GB hard drive, and adequate stereo speakers—are just about on target for the category. Tiny does fill a portion of the 20GB hard drive with some commendable software, though, including Microsoft Works 2000 (expected to be upgraded to Works 2001 by the time you read this), MGI PhotoSuite III, Trend Micro's PCcillin antivirus utility, and PowerQuest's SecondChance (a file- and system-restoration utility that's somewhat superfluous now that Windows Me offers similar functionality).

The Tiny-branded Goldstar monitor offers a reasonably clear image at 800x600, but it loses a lot of sharpness when you jump to 1,024x768. If you need to work at that resolution, consider subtracting the monitor from your order and shopping elsewhere for one. Tiny's housebrand speakers held their own in games such as Quake III, for which their optional 3D and bass-boost effects enhanced the experience. Music, on the other hand, sounded flat and tinny, and the special effects actually seemed to diminish the audio quality. You'll find a headphone jack on the right speaker.

Tiny's keyboard has a comfortable, sturdy feel and offers the convenience of four programmable quick-launch buttons. It's also home to volume and playback controls, plus dedicated buttons for launching your Web browser and putting the system into sleep mode.

Though equipped with the same 900MHz Athlon processor as the ABS AMD Web Special, the Tiny system scored higher on the Business Winstone 2001 and Content Creation Winstone 2001 tests. Frankly, given its significantly slower nVidia TNT2 graphics card, we're not entirely sure how it accomplished this feat.

From a hardware standpoint, the Value

BUDGET PCs

Select 900-A closely resembles Dell's Dimension L866, although it offers greater expandability and better graphics acceleration. Still, the Dell includes a much superior monitor and a better warranty—both arguably more important features. If you're simply looking for a competent system, the Tiny Value Select 900-A qualifies as a winner. But there are better-equipped systems to be had for the same price.

THE PRICE IS RIGHT

Even though these four systems are priced within \$50 of one another, they have some important differences. Do you need a DVD drive? Are you looking for a system that can handle spreadsheets and the occasional deathmatch? Do you plan to add components to your system over time? These are all questions you should be asking before getting out your credit card.

That said, we couldn't help marveling at how far \$1,000 can go these days. All four of the systems reviewed here are solidly built, fast-performing PCs from reliable vendors—there are really no lemons in the bunch. Still, the ABS AMD Web Special simply floored us with its 900MHz Athlon CPU, GeForce2 graphics board, DVD drive, and three-piece speaker system. If you can do better than that for less than a grand, please be sure to let us know.

The 1.1GHz Athlon-based NuTrend Athlon Special was a close second in features, but our problems in getting a working system earn it a cautious recommendation. The Dell Dimension L866, however, gets a hardy thumbs-up for those in need of a straitlaced business system. Dell's superb warranty also makes it a good deal for newbies in need of some handholding. Tiny's Value Select 900-A, meanwhile, lacks a DVD drive, but it has the graphics horsepower to qualify it as a good choice for families.

Remember that all of these vendors.

inding an inexpensive PC isn't difficult, with high-profile companies such as Dell offering systems for as little as \$599 at this writing. Still, here are some sources for truly low-cost PCs that you might not have thought of.

- Start with the bargain-basement shops for name-brand refurbished PCs:
- For Compaq, go to www.compaqworks. com, and pick the Auctions or Desktop choices.
- For Dell, see www.dell.com/us/en/dfo/misc/ segmenter_dfo.htm, and choose Home and Home Office.
 - For micronpc.com, check www.micronpc. com, and choose Factory Outlet.
 - For Micro Exchange (a major seller of refurbs), try www.microexchange.com.

You can also go to the Web site for any name-brand manufacturer and search for "refurbished" or "reconditioned."

- Another strategy is to visit computer exchanges for used systems. For example, at cmp.thecomputerexchange.com, take a look at the For Sale Classified and Bid to Buy Auctions. For more sources, try searching at your favorite search engine for "computer exchange," and don't forget about auction sites such as eBay.
- Also, check out surplus-computer sources. such as Computer Surplus Outlet (www.computersurplusoutlet.com)

-M.D.S.

with the exception of Tiny, also provide online configurators that let you tweak a system's components. If you can squeeze a few more dollars out of your budget (and, admittedly, cross that \$1,000 chasm), you may want to consider upgrading to a CD-RW drive or perhaps a better monitor. V

EDITORS' RATING	8.2		6.7		6.8		6.3	
SYSTEM	ABS AMD Web Specia	al	Dell Dim	ension L866	NuTrend A	Athlon Special	Tiny Valu	e Select 900-A
COMPANY	ABS Computer Technol Whittier, CA 800-876-8088 www.buyabs.com	ologies BEST BUY	Dell Com Round Ro 800-999- www.de	ock, TX -3355	NuTrend (Whittier, C 888-482-(www.nut	6678	Tiny Com Tacoma, V 877-202-2 www.tiny	/A 3529
DIRECT PRICE	\$999	4280	\$949	34281	\$999	34282	\$988	34283

Formally Known as

Streaks and unnatural colors shouldn't be the first thing people notice when they look at your photo prints. These four specialized printers put the life back in your snapshots.



Once you've decided a photo printer is right for you, your next hurdle is to determine if you should buy a general-purpose printer or a specialized printer. Try to figure out how often you'll use your printer for photos and how often you'll use it for more mundane tasks, such as text and drafts. If you'll use it only sporadically for photos, a

standard inkjet printer may fit the bill. But if you already have a printer—perhaps a business-oriented laser or an older inkjet-you may want to shop for a second printer with photo-specific features, such as a memory-card slot or a tray for 4x6-inch media. Most photo printers have a USB connector as well as a parallelport connector, which makes it easy for them to function as an auxiliary printer.

Be aware that, over time, you'll probably spend more on consumables (paper and ink cartridges) than you'll spend

for the printer itself. Premium paper can cost as much as 40 cents to \$1.90 for a highquality, full-page print, and photo-ink cartridges can cost considerably more than black-ink cartridges, so consider the total cost before you make your choice. Also note that some of the more expensive photo printers perform well with plain paper and less expensive photo papers. So you may

want to spend the extra money outright to save more in the long run. If you plan to use special papers for postcards, 4x6 snapshots, or T-shirt imprints, check to see that the printer can use nonproprietary supplies or



that you can purchase the supplies from the manufacturer.

Today's photo printers are more reliable and more versatile than ever. The four printers we reviewed for this feature—the HP PhotoSmart 1215, Kodak Personal Picture Maker 200, Lexmark Z82 Color Jetprinter, and Olympus P-400-can create photographic prints good enough to be framed and hung on the wall. One is a dye-sublimation printer; three are inkjets. When combined with a high-quality digital camera, these printers can become the equivalent of a professional darkroom—without the chemical mess.

HP PHOTOSMART 1215

	EDITORS' RATING 7.2
PAPER HANDLING	FEATURES
PROS: High-quality photo prints; CompactFlash and SmartMedia slots; compatible with IBM Microdrives; provides access to memory card from Windows; communicates with infrared devices	
slots; compatible with IBM Microdrives; provides access to memory card from Windows; communicates with infrared devices	
	slots; compatible with IBM Microdrives; provides access to memory card from Windows; communicates with infrared devices

f you're looking for a solid-performing, multipurpose printer optimized for printing photos, look no further than the \$399 HP PhotoSmart 1215. Using HP's proprietary PhotoREt III for color resolutions as high as 2,400x1,200 dpi, the 1215 creates photo prints that approach the smooth color gradations and subtle shading of dye-sublimation prints, but at a fraction of the cost. The quality of its text printouts is also a cut or two above that of the average inkjet printer (though not as good as a laser printer).

The 1215 has both CompactFlash and SmartMedia slots, so you can print your photos from compatible digital cameras without using a computer. The Compact-Flash slot supports Type II as well as Type I cards, and is compatible with IBM's 170MB, 340MB, and 1GB Microdrives. Moreover, the included software lets you use the printer's internal card from Windows, so you can

< FEATURE COMPARISON >

	HP PhotoSmart 1215	Kodak Personal Picture Maker 200	Lexmark Z82 Color Jetprinter	Olympus P-400
MFR. EST. PRICE	\$399	\$199.95	\$199.99	\$999
Rated Engine Speed	15 ppm (black), 12 ppm (color)	6 ppm (black), 3 ppm (color)	8 ppm (black), 4 ppm (color)	0.6 ppm
Rated Maximum Resolution (dpi)	2,400x1,200	1,200x1,200	1,200x1,200	314
Supported OS (Windows)	Windows 95, 98, Me, 2000, NT 4.0	Windows 98, Me, 2000	Windows 95, 98, Me	Windows 95, 98, Me, 2000, NT 4.0
Supported OS (Mac)	8.6 or later (G3)*	8.6 or later	NA	8.6 or later
Maximum Paper Size (Inches)	8.5x14	8x14	8x14	8.25x11.7 or 8.25x7.87 only
Maximum Media Weight (Pounds)	24	150	110	NA (Olympus dye-sub paper required)
Supported Removable Media	CompactFlash, SmartMedia, IBM Microdrive	CompactFlash, SmartMedia	None	SmartMedia, Type II PC Card (with optional adapter, CompactFlash and Memory Stick)
USB Connection	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
USB Cable Included	No	No	No (parallel included)	No
Printer Technology	Thermal inkjet with HP PhotoREt III	Thermal inkjet	Thermal inkjet	Dye sublimation with UV overcoat
Thumbnail (n-up) Printing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dimensions With Trays/Supports Extended (HWD, Inches)	17.3x8x14.8	10.8x18x18.5	10.2x14.5x17.5	18.5x16x26
Weight (Pounds)	14.2	7.8	17.2	26.5
Software Included	ArcSoft PhotoImpression 2000 (PC and Mac), HP printing software, IrPrint, PrintConnect, JetSend IR	Kodak Picture Page Software	SmarThru 2 scanner software (photo editing, OCR, and fax), choice of two bonus software titles for cost of shipping and handling	CamediaMaster (drivers, utility for transferring background and stamp images to printer from PC), PDF manual on CD
SERVICE AND SUPPORT Standard Warranty (Parts and Labor)	One year	One year	One year	One year
Technical-Support Hours (ET)	8 a.m. to midnight (M-F), 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. (Sa)	9 a.m. to 9 p.m. (M-F), noon to 6 p.m. (Sa-Su)	9 a.m. to 9 p.m. (M-F), noon to 6 p.m. (Sa-Su)	8 a.m. to 10 p.m. (M-F)
Overnight Exchange Included in Warranty	No	Yes	Yes	Only with Business Edition bundle**

copy your photos without having to use a separate card reader or a computer-to-camera connection. Simply place the memory card into the printer, and use Windows Explorer to drag and drop your photos onto

your hard drive. The printer also has infrared capability, so you can transfer files wirelessly from an infrared-equipped notebook, PDA, digital camera, or cell phone. The printer communicates with infrared devices that support the HP JetSend, OBEX, or IrLPT protocols.

Other features that make the 1215 convenient to use as a photo printer include a separate tray for 4x6-inch photo paper, an optical paper sensor that automatically adjusts the printer settings for the type of paper (plain, glossy, or trans-

parency), and both parallel-port and USB connectors.

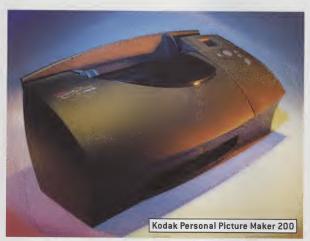
formed well with both plain and premium

The REt color-layering technology per-

range of colors and a wider contrast range. Though there's an obvious difference between the 1215's plain- and glossy-paper printouts, the plain-paper photos are quite

glossy papers. Compared with the plain-paper

printouts from the Lexmark Z82, the 1215's plain-paper printouts showed a broader



usable for a range of purposes.

The HP PhotoSmart 1215 duly impressed us. You can find other inkjet printers for far less money, but you'll have a hard time finding one that can match the 1215's versatility and overall print quality.

KODAK PERSONAL PICTURE MAKER 200

EDITORS' RATING 6.0 PERFORMANCE OUTPUT QUALITY VALUE PAPER HANDLING PROS: Built-in 1.8-inch LCD; CompactFlash and SmartMedia slots; includes photo-ink cartridge CONS: Photo prints show red tint and poor contrast; prints too slowly

t first glance, the \$199.95 Kodak Personal Picture Maker 200, manufactured by Lexmark, seems to be just another inkjet printer. A closer look, however, reveals an unusual feature—a 1.8inch color LCD similar to those found on many digital cameras. This LCD screen serves a similar purpose, letting you preview your digital photos and select the ones that you wish to print. For digital-camera users looking to bypass the computer entirely, this could be a useful feature.

The Picture Maker 200 provides both CompactFlash and SmartMedia slots, which makes it directly compatible with many digital cameras. The 1.8-inch screen displays enough detail to distinguish between nearly identical images. The front-mounted controls let you choose the number of copies to print, as well as the size and layout of the printouts.

Because the printer is optimized for Kodak-brand papers, we tested it with Kodak Premium Picture Paper. Looked at next to output from the HP PhotoSmart 1215 using the same paper, the Picture Maker 200's had a bit too much contrast: Light areas were slightly washed out, and dark areas lacked some detail. The prints also had a slight red tinge that gave the impression of a more limited color range than was visible in the original photo. On the other hand, the colors were more saturated on the Picture Maker print than on the PhotoSmart print. Plain-paper prints of the same photo showed a similar color vibrancy, but were overly red and, strangely, had too little contrast, compared with the plain-paper printouts from the HP printer.

Like the Lexmark Z82, the Picture Maker 200 has slots for two ink cartridges: either a black and a color cartridge, or a photo and a color cartridge. Unlike the Lexmark, the Kodak ships with the photo and color cartridges, the preferred combination for printing photographs. The Kodak and Lexmark cartridges appear identical,

These images were produced at each printer's maximum resolution on glossy Kodak photo paper. Although we were quite impressed with the overall level of quality here, there are some subtle differences in the output. For example, look carefully at the level of color saturation in each photo.

(Notice the red tint on the pink cloth in the left foreground of the image from the Kodak printer.) Also, compare the consistency of the red in the couch (both the HP and Lexmark display some purple tinge in the lower left corner) or the gold of the tasseled cloth draped across it. Despite these differences, however, we believe that most users would be satisfied with the performance of any of these printers.





Kodak Personal Picture Maker 200



Lexmark Z82 Color Jetprinter



Olympus P-400

Though the Kodak Personal Picture Maker 200's printouts are of a lesser quality than those from some other inkjets, we were intrigued by the built-in LCD. It makes this printer extremely easy to use when paired with a compatible digital camera.

LEXMARK Z82 COLOR JETPRINTER

EDITORS' RATING 7.4	
FEATURES8	PERFORMANCE6
OUTPUT QUALITY7	VALUE9
PAPER HANDLING7	

PROS: Combines printer, scanner, and copier in one device; low price all components use a single USB cable; surprisingly high-quality photo

CONS: Larger than most inkjet printers; servicing unit may be

If you're in the market for a photo printer, but you find it hard to justify the expense of a specialized peripheral, consider

the Lexmark Z82 Color Jetprinter. It's a combination inkjet printer, scanner, and copier. Best of all, its low \$199.99 price makes it a terrific bargain.

As with any multifunction device, you have to ask up front how capable the different

functions are. You may not expect them to compete

with \$1,000 worth of separate devices, but you should expect adequate performance.



The Z82 ships with both black and color cartridges, which can be used simultaneously. To use the printer as a true photo printer, however, you'll have to purchase the optional \$39.99 photo cartridge, which replaces the black cartridge. The color- and photo-cartridge combination yields smoother color gradations than the black- and color-cartridge combination, but it also produces

slightly muddier blacks. Nevertheless, the Z82's output was outstanding at the highest quality setting, even with plain paper. Using Kodak Premium Picture Paper, the results compared favorably with those of the HP PhotoSmart 1215 and Olympus P-400. The color gradations were smoother with the specialized printers, but not by as much as you might expect, considering the wide variations in price.

The unit is larger than a standard inkjet printer, though it takes up much less space

than three separate components. The threein-one design does have one significant drawback: If one component breaks, you'll have to send the entire device back for repair.

Resolution Isn't Everything

re you confused when you compare printer resolutions? Why does the black text from a 300-dpi laser printer look much sharper than the color text from a 1,200-dpi inkjet printer? And why does a photo look better printed on a 314-dpi dye-sublimation printer than it does on a 600-dpi inkjet printer? Clearly, there's more to printing than simply placing a large number of dots on a page.

As you might expect, these differences are related to the technologies inside the printers. A typical 600-dpi monochrome laser printer creates text by printing rows of black dots-all the same shade of black. It simulates grays with combinations of black (printed) and white (nonprinted) dots. To simulate 65 shades of gray, the printed page is broken into tiny grids that are eight dots tall and eight dots wide, which reduces the practical resolution from 600 dpi to 75 dpi.

Color inkjet printers use a similar process to simulate a full palette of colors from just three, four, or six primary colors. The primary colors can't always get the hue exactly right for each dot, so most inkjet printers dither the colored dots. Often a color error is deliberately repeated to the four adjacent image pixels. Then

the next pixels are overcompensated in the opposite amount. For example, one group may not be blue enough, so the next group is made too blue. The eye tends to blur the differences and approximate the correct color. Adding more primary colors helps color accuracy, as does decreasing the size of the ink drops.

Hewlett-Packard inkjet print-



ers use a different approach for their color graphics. The company's proprietary Resolution Enhancement technology (REt) blends colors by printing multiple ink drops on a single dot. The color is dithered onto one dot rather than a grid of dots. The downside of this approach is that some combinations of colors may appear murky or overprinted. Nevertheless, with a palette of thousands of possible colors for any individual dot, this system comes close to

printing photographs with a continuous tone.

For true continuoustone printing, you have to go with an entirely different technology, such as the one used in dye-sublimation printers. These printers usually heat the ink until it turns into a gas. Using different temperatures to apply varying amounts of color to the page, the color is applied continuously, rather than as a series of dots. The result looks more lifelike, even when the rated resolution is a modest 314 dpi, as it is with the Olympus P-400.

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The built-in flatbed scanner has an optical resolution of 300x600 dpi and a maximum of 4,800 dpi with software interpolation. The copier has an optical resolution of 300x600 dpi and provides settings for blackand-white or color copies, reduced or enlarged copies (from 25 percent to 400 percent in 1 percent increments), multiple copies (up to 99 pages), and collated copies. Moreover, the copy function can be used with the computer powered off.

The Lexmark Z82 Color Jetprinter produces surprisingly good photo prints, especially given its low price. Though it doesn't produce the absolute best-quality printouts, scans, or copies, it's a sensible choice for a business or home on a tight budget.

OLYMPUS P-400

EDITORS' RATING 7.4	
FEATURES7	PERFORMANCE7
OUTPUT QUALITY9	VALUE7
PAPER HANDLING7	
PROC. Profossional quality printer	SmartModia and PC Card slots: PC

Card slot, with optional adapter, can accept CompactFlash cards and Memory Sticks

CONS: Printer and consumables are expensive; can't print on plain paper; limited selection of papers

ost photo printers can do more than just print photos on high-gloss paper. They can print plain-paper letters and reports, as well as plain-paper photos. The Olympus P-400 is a dedicated printer that can only print on expensive proprietary glossy paper. There's no draft mode, because every page costs the same (about \$1.90). To top it off, the P-400's \$999 price makes it more than a casual purchase.

The P-400 uses dye-sublimation technology, rather than the more common inkjet technology, creating continuous-tone printouts with vibrant colors. If you look closely at the photo prints from an inkjet printer, you'll notice a slight but pervasive dot pattern that distinguishes its printouts from true photographs. Dye-sublimation prints, however, are virtually indistinguishable from professionally processed photos. And despite what appears to be an inordinately high price for the printer and its consumables, the P-400 actually represents a price breakthrough for full-page dye-sublimation printing.



The P-400 comes equipped with USB and

parallel-port connectors, as well as Smart-Media and PC Card slots. With the appro-



priate adapter, the PC Card slot can handle CompactFlash cards and Memory Stick media. The built-in controls let you choose the type of print (standard, postcard, photo album, or index), as well as the input source (SmartMedia, PC Card, USB, or parallel port). The P-400 takes only two sizes of paper: A4 (8.25x11.7 inches) and A5 Wide (8.25x7.87 inches). The postcard mode prints on paper with perforations that let you detach two borderless postcards. The photo-album mode prints smaller pictures against a photographic background. And the index mode prints thumbnail images on a single page, which is a convenient way to document the contents of a memory card.

So how much better are the P-400 prints? Comparing the same high-resolution photographic image printed on a P-400 and on an HP PhotoSmart 1215 with premium glossy paper, we saw in the P-400 print crisper colors, smoother transithe darker areas. The difference isn't startling, but it is quite noticeable.

If print quality is of the utmost importance to you-and you don't mind spending the extra money—the Olympus P-400 could

be your best choice for a professionalquality photo printer.

THE PHOTO FINISH

he four printers reviewed here are diverse enough to appeal to different types of shoppers. Which one should you choose? For top-quality photos, the clear choice is the Olympus P-400. Both the printer and its consumables are expensive, however, and you can't use the P-400 for plain-paper photos.

The HP PhotoSmart 1215 is our next choice for photographic quality. It's considerably less costly than the Olympus and also functions well as a general-purpose printer. The HP photo prints are almost as good as those from the Olympus, which says a lot given the difference in printer technologies. (See the sidebar "Resolution Isn't Everything.")

For versatility, it's hard to beat the Lexmark Z82 Color Jetprinter—especially for less than \$200. It's a highly capable printer, well worth considering if you're on a

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tight budget and need a printer, scanner, and copier.

Although the quality of the printouts produced by the Kodak Personal Picture Maker 200 isn't quite up to that of the other e printers, its built-in LCD screen makes

> it a good choice for digital shutterbugs who want to feed their digital pictures directly into a stand-alone printer. Even its lesser-quality printouts are superior to the output of many of the photo printers of several years ago. V

EDITORS' RATING (Rated 1 to 10)	7.2	6.0	7.4 BEST	7.4
PRODUCT	HP PhotoSmart 1215	Kodak Personal Picture Maker 200	Lexmark Z82 Color Jetprinter	Olympus P-400
COMPANY	Hewlett-Packard Co. Palo Alto, CA 800-307-6397, 650-857-1501 www.hp.com	Eastman Kodak Co. Rochester, NY 800-242-2424, 716-724-4000 www.kodak.com	Lexmark International Lexington, KY 888-539-6275, 859-232-2000 www.lexmark.com	Olympus America Melville, NY 888-553-4448, 631-844-5000 www.olympusamerica.com
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PHOTO-EDITING SOFTWARE

Home photo-finishing software optimizes and packages your pictures.

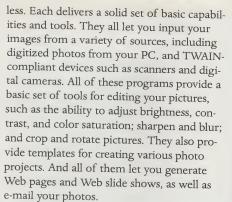
BY LYNN GINSBURG

ome people snap shots with a digital camera; others use traditional film models and then scan in the resulting prints. Whichever way you digitize your photos, a pack of consumeroriented photo-finishing products is ready to help you edit them to perfection and present them to the world.

We rounded up and reviewed the four top home photo finishers, all of which sell for less than \$100, some for much



PHOTO-EDITING SOFTWARE



Ease of use is another universal in this crowd, as is the ability to work with each element in a composite image as a separate layer—a feature borrowed from professional image-editing packages. This means that you can create a photo montage yet still move each element separately.

The programs differ in their user-friendliness, the special effects and filters they offer, the number and quality of templates for photo projects included, and the depth of control provided by the tools. Read on to discover how Kai's PhotoSoap2, MGI PhotoSuite 4-Platinum Edition. Microsoft Picture It Photo Premium 2001, and Ulead PhotoImpact 6 perform, and to find out which is the best home photo finisher for you.

KAI'S PHOTOSOAP2

EDITORS' RATING 7.0 FEATURES PERFORMANCE ... SERVICE AND SUPPORT

PROS: Fun, innovative interface; 3D "real feel" touch-up and image-CONS: No true templates for photo print projects; less in-depth tools and controls; interface takes some getting used to

Kai's PhotoSoap2 has a unique look. Rather than using standard Windows menus (File, Edit, and the like), it presents an interface structured like the image-editing process itself. You begin in a clean white space with five tabs: Organize,

Clean, Compose, Album, and Print. Select Organize, and start putting your digital images in order. PhotoSoap2 lets you add keywords and descriptions so that your photo files are searchable.

In Clean you perform standard imageediting tasks, such as sharpening, blurring, smoothing, and removing red-eye. Here's where you can also work with PhotoSoap2's image touch-up and editing tools, such as brushes, pencils, water, and even fingers. These fun-to-use tools look like the effects they represent: You smudge with a shadow-casting 3D finger, blur with

Kai's PhotoSoap2

a transparent water drop, and paint with a nicely modeled soft-bristle brush. But PhotoSoap2's spartan special-effects collection is less than impressive—probably because Kai's SuperGoo program specializes in these.

In Compose you can create photo-montage compositions using layers. Album lets you build photo albums that you can print out or save as instant HTML pages, complete with URL and e-mail links. (You can also use the Output option under Organize to create HTML pages using the images open on your desktop, or HTML slide

Finally, in Print, you choose to output to your printer. You can use specialty papers from Kodak or Avery to create photo print projects such as greeting cards and calendars. Here's one of PhotoSoap2's greatest limitations: Aside from these specialty-paper options (which are only print outlines), no other templates are provided for creating photo print projects. Considering that programs like PhotoSuite and Picture It offer hundreds of such templates, this is a real weakness.

PhotoSoap2 also lacks rollover tool tips, which makes some tools difficult to discern. However, as with the program's distinctive interface, once you get used to using the tools, they become second nature. You won't find any wizards, either, but the program is so simple to use, you won't need them.

Kai's PhotoSoap2 doesn't give you the depth of tools or degree of control that the other programs in this roundup do. But that's also its charm. Some will prefer its straightforwardness to the complexity that too many features can add. And for \$19.95, it's not only fun and productive, it's affordable.

MGI PHOTOSUITE 4—PLATINUM EDITION

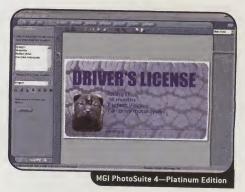
EDITORS' RATING 7.0	
EASE OF USE .7 FEATURES .7 PERFORMANCE .7	SERVICE AND SUPPORT

PROS: Easy-to-use, wizard-driven interface; excellent variety of Web photo projects; Panorama tool for interactive 360-degree photo tours CONS: No obvious way to cancel out or step back out of multistep processes; small number of special effects and filters

MGI PhotoSuite 4—Platinum Edition tries to strike a balance between ease of use and extensive functionality. Like PhotoSoap2, the program's initial interface echoes the work flow of photo editing, breaking down the process into Get, Prepare, Compose, Organize, Share, and Print. But unlike PhotoSoap2, PhotoSuite also provides a standard menu for those who prefer to jump quickly to a tool or function.

When you choose a task, tools specific to it appear in a left-side panel. For instance, choose Prepare, and a variety of editing, retouching, and special-effects tools appear. Choose, say, Touchup, and all of the touch-up tools appear in the panel. Wizards walk you through each task from project's beginning to end. The wizards give you plenty of opportunity to work with the parameters of the controls yourself, letting you create custom effects. One problem with the wizards, however, is that there isn't an obvious way to cancel, step back, or reset your work.

PhotoSuite includes a large number of templates. Unfortunately, the program includes just a few less-than-spectacular special effects. But PhotoSuite does make it easy to share your photos with others on the Web, letting you easily create multimedia slide shows, Web pages, and GIF anima-



tions. A special feature even lets you "stitch" together interactive 360-degree panoramas that can be viewed on the Web. You can also use the PhotoTapestry feature to create mosaics of tiled images.

PhotoSuite's ease of use and far-reaching functionality should appeal to entry-level

users. This combination puts it in direct competition with Microsoft Picture It, which offers a more usable interface and more extensive effects and filters. Still, capable image-editing tools and Web features make the \$49.95 MGI PhotoSuite 4—Platinum Edition a good value and a sound choice.

MICROSOFT PICTURE IT PHOTO PREMIUM 2001

EDITORS' RATING 7.8 SERVICE AND SUPPORT EASE OF USE ..

PROS: Interface is easy to use, but allows advanced customization; good undo facility; excellent special effects CONS: Memory hog; requires Internet Explorer 5.5



PERFORMANCE

For those who want a higher degree of control over imageediting and photo projects, but still want to be shielded from

the associated complexities, Microsoft's \$54.95 Picture It Photo Premium 2001 strikes a winning balance. When you open up Picture It, you're initially presented with a very un-Microsoft-like interface and the fewest up-front choices: "Pick a

design," "Show my pictures and projects," or "Get creative ideas." Once you enter the program proper, as with PhotoSuite, you'll also have the option to use a menu if you prefer to jump straight to a feature.

Choose "Show my pictures..." to get going on standard image-editing tasks. As with PhotoSuite, once you open a photo, the left-hand panel is filled with image-editing options. Choose one, and the panel displays only choices related to the task at hand. For instance, choose "Cutouts and Pictures/Create a Cutout," and you're presented with different ways to cut out an object from the picture. Task wizards walk you through the process step-by-step, and unlike PhotoSuite, let you undo your last action, revert the image to the original, or cancel out altogether to return to the previous step. Context-sensitive help will appear onscreen to explain tasks in detail, and multimedia movies are on hand to

PHOTO-EDITING SOFTWARE



explain key program features.

Picture It's special effects, especially its Illusions, come the closest to rivaling PhotoImpact's, offering both variety and high quality. However, they're still no match for the high degree of control provided by PhotoImpact's professional-level tools. One nice extra is Picture It's Mini Lab, which lets you add image-editing

effects to multiple images at once. If you have a whole roll of film that has a green cast, you can compensate for the cast on all of the pictures with a single command.

Picture It offers a huge number of templates for a wide variety of projects. Highquality designs make Web photo projects easy to create. In addition to Web photo albums, multimedia slide shows, and single Web pages, you can use your photos to send e-mail postcards—an extra not offered by the other programs we looked at.

Picture It proved to be a memory hog. Using a 550MHz Pentium with 128MB of RAM, we repeatedly got "low on memory" error messages. One other minor flaw: Picture It requires you to have Internet Explorer 5.5 or later preloaded. It uses the browser as an integrated part of the program.

Otherwise, Picture It is a pleasure to use. With an interface that makes it fast and fun to step through common editing tasks, but with plenty of room for customization with high-end effects, Microsoft Picture It Photo Premium 2001 is hard to beat.

Publish Your Pictures Online

ow that you've brushed up Your pictures, there's an easy way to share them with friends, family, and even the whole wide Web if you wish: photo-sharing sites.

Sites such as Club Photo (www.clubphoto.com), Kodak PhotoNet (www.photonet.com), Ofoto (www.ofoto.com), PhotoLoft (www.photoloft.com), and Zing (www.zing.com) accept uploaded digital images and let you create online photo albums.

Some offer to develop your rolls of film (which you mail in and the company posts to the Web, prints on paper, or burns on a CD) for a fee. Most also offer rudimentary image-editing tools, but these pale in comparison to even the most basic photo-finishing software. Once your albums are online, most sites help you issue e-mail invitations to others to peruse them.

Shop around, because not all sites offer the same set of perks and privileges. Posting on



most sites is free, though some, such as PhotoNet, charge fees for storing images over time. Also consider security and privacy; make sure the photo-sharing site you choose offers password-protected security. And compare the amenities. Zing, for instance, offers lots of free extras such as online slide shows, collaborative online photo albums, and the ability to print your photos at home.



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ULEAD PHOTOIMPACT 6

EDITORS' RATING 7.8 EASE OF USE SERVICE AND SUPPORT VALUE PERFORMANCE

PROS: Provides near-professional-level control over all aspects of image editing; extensive, highly customizable preset special effects

CONS: Less accessible to novice users; Web album and slide shows not as easy to create as in other programs here

Of the four programs here, Ulead PhotoImpact 6 is the most advanced—as well as the most expensive. It balances complexity and accessibility, presenting a depth of control and power that appeals to professionals, while offering novices a program they can evolve with.

PhotoImpact is much more than an



image editor. You can use it to create Web graphics and Web-page elements like buttons and backgrounds, and use the included Ulead GIF Animator to generate animations.

When it comes to actually editing images and applying special effects, none of the programs in this roundup comes close to the level of control PhotoImpact offers its users. In addition to its large number of standard image-editing tools, PhotoImpact

PHOTO-EDITING

offers high-end options such as a Bézier selection tool, the ability to record macros, and multiple undo with named steps.

However, you'll find no warm and fuzzy hand-holding here. PhotoImpact makes scant effort to shield you from the complexity of its sophisticated toolset. It offers no wizards to help you with typical tasks; novices using PhotoImpact will miss the guidance. You get an initial HTML product demo, but after that you're on your own.

The onscreen EasyPalette is the control center for applying special effects and performing common image-editing tasks. The less experienced will appreciate being able to see what an image will look like if a certain effect is applied. You can even use your own image as the thumbnail to get a quick preview of the effects. Alternately, more experienced users can adjust the parameters of the presets, thereby exerting a great degree of control over the results. This kind of customizability is unequaled in the other programs reviewed here.

PhotoImpact's weakest points are its Web-album and slide-show features. If you try to create an album or slide show, the only option is to use an entire folder full of images. PhotoImpact comes with a companion program, PhotoImpact Album, which makes it easier to create Web albums and slide shows. But even here, albums and slide shows you create for the Web can't include multimedia elements like sound. The other programs do not impose this limitation.

Overall, Ulead PhotoImpact 6 offers such a wealth of features that competing home-oriented programs can't compare. The depth of control it affords could be

off-putting to novices, but for those who want to grow into a program that offers sophisticated image-editing possibilities, PhotoImpact is the clear choice.

PHOTO FINISH

Finding a good fit for your needs isn't hard because these programs vary in their capabilities, ease of use, and prices.

Kai's PhotoSoap2 is an impulse buy at \$19.95. It's great if you want the imageediting basics in a package with no learning curve. Just note that it has the most limited toolset, and virtually no photoproject templates.

At the other end of the spectrum, Ulead PhotoImpact 6 packs a powerful cadre of tools. Learning the program takes time and effort, but in return you get tremendous functionality and control. And for \$99.95, you'll get professional tools at a consumer-friendly price.

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Between these two extremes lie MGI PhotoSuite 4—Platinum Edition and Microsoft Picture It Photo Premium 2001. Both offer task-driven interfaces with wizards, as well as a wide variety of templates. However, PhotoSuite has far fewer special

effects than Picture It. and Picture It's interface and wizards are easier to navigate. PhotoSuite does offer two useful features that Picture It lacks: its Panorama and PhotoTapestry tools. Both programs are excellent, but for overall usability and value, Picture It has a slight edge. V

EDITORS' RATING (Rated 1 to 10)	7.0	7.0	7.8 BEST BUY	7.8
PRODUCT	Kai's PhotoSoap2	MGI PhotoSuite 4— Platinum Edition	Microsoft Picture It Photo Premium 2001	Ulead PhotoImpact 6
COMPANY	ScanSoft Peabody, MA 800-736-5730, 978-977-2000 www.scansoft.com	MGI Software Corp. Richmond Hill, ON, Canada 888-644-7638 www.mgisoft.com	Microsoft Corp. Redmond, WA 800-426-9400, 425-882-8080 www.microsoft.com	Ulead Systems Torrance, CA 800-858-5323, 310-896-6388 www.ulead.com
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\$2119 **NIGHT DREAMER**



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AMD ATHLON AMD ATHLON AMD ATHLON AMD ATHLON AMD ATHLON	900 1G HZ 1.1G HZ 1.2G HZ 1.3G HZ	\$ 1279 \$ 1305 \$ 1355	(gpsp041) (gpsp042) (gpsp043) (gpsp044) (gpsp045)	
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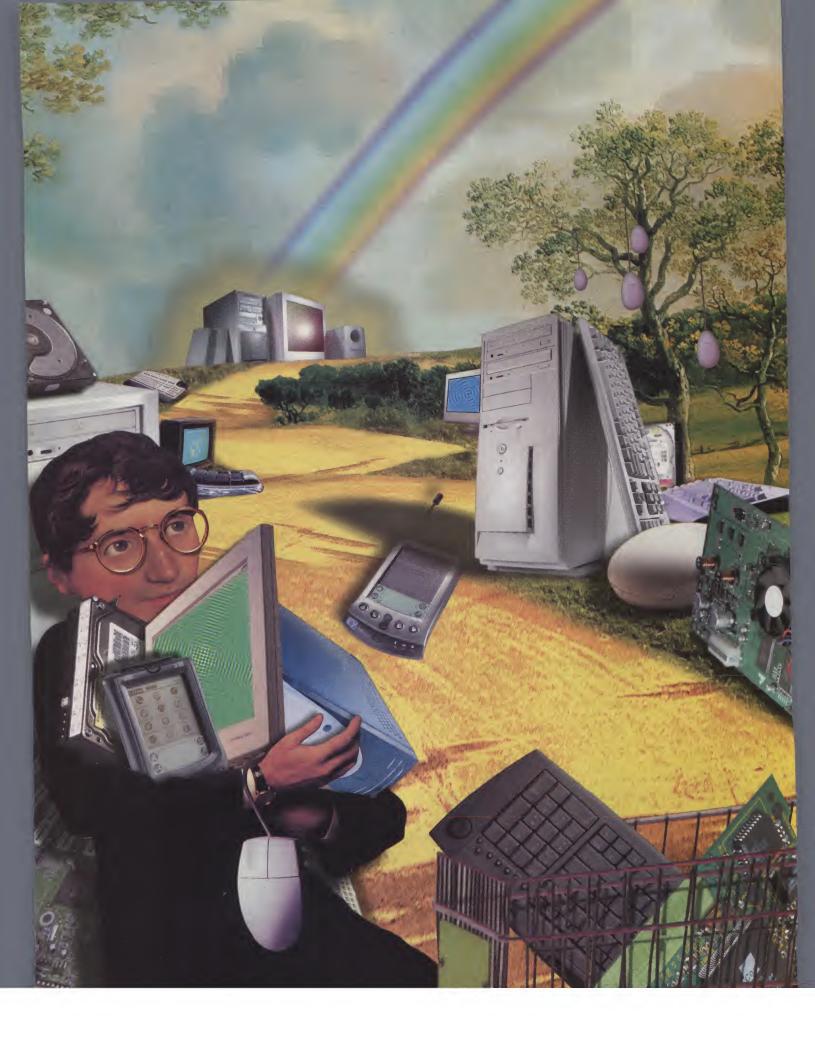
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DOTALS to DOWE DODINS

While a penny saved is still a penny earned, an audio card for \$15 after rebate has a much sweeter sound to it these days.

Just as shoppers have learned to leverage the Web to snap up bargains on books and travel, they're also using it to shop price-savvy for computer products from the ordinary to the obscure.

The best way to do so is by harnessing the power of price-comparison sites, or bots, as they're sometimes called. These shopping engines take a lot of the legwork—make that clickwork—out of online shopping by finding Web merchants that stock specified products and delivering on-the-fly price comparisons.

"I derive a certain satisfaction from being able to find the best deals without driving all over town or waiting on hold for a clerk to see if a store carries [something]," says Web designer Kathryn Hudson, who uses the popular mySimon (www.mysimon.com) to buy products like tape-backup drives. (MySimon is owned by CNET Networks, Computer Shopper's parent company.) "The plus side is that you don't have to go on a wild-goose chase through the Web. These sites have really eliminated the need to wade through the rubble that has become e-commerce."

Suppose, for instance, you want to buy a Compaq iPaq handheld
PC. You could find the PDA at dozens of online vendors, but you
might spend an entire afternoon tracking
them down. Then you would have to slog

BY RICK BROIDA

through each site, search for the handheld, check to see if it's in stock, record the price for comparison, and so on. So much for

saving time.

A shopping portal streamlines the experience. Simply search once for the iPaq, and the engine immediately returns a current price list culled from any number of Web merchants, delivering a quick overview of the best deals, and links to the appropriate purchasing page for each site.

Some portals offer this invaluable service for products that range from computers and electronics to books and music. Others focus exclusively on computer gear. We'll introduce you to both types, in addition to some sites that specialize in harder-to-find stuff such as ISDN sniffers and LCD videophones—parts that aren't always readily available at Web superstores like buy.com and CDW.

Novice Web shoppers should keep in mind that shopping portals don't sell merchandise directly, but rather link you to sites that do. So don't expect a portal to help you track a shipment, arrange a return, or settle a dispute with a merchant, those services are beyond their purview. Consider these bots interactive yellow pages, sources of leads and information. In all cases, the shopping transaction happens at the merchants' sites.

Though they are alike in that respect, portals vary dramatically in the products

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Compaq CV735 17" Monitor (16.0" VIA): Add \$70

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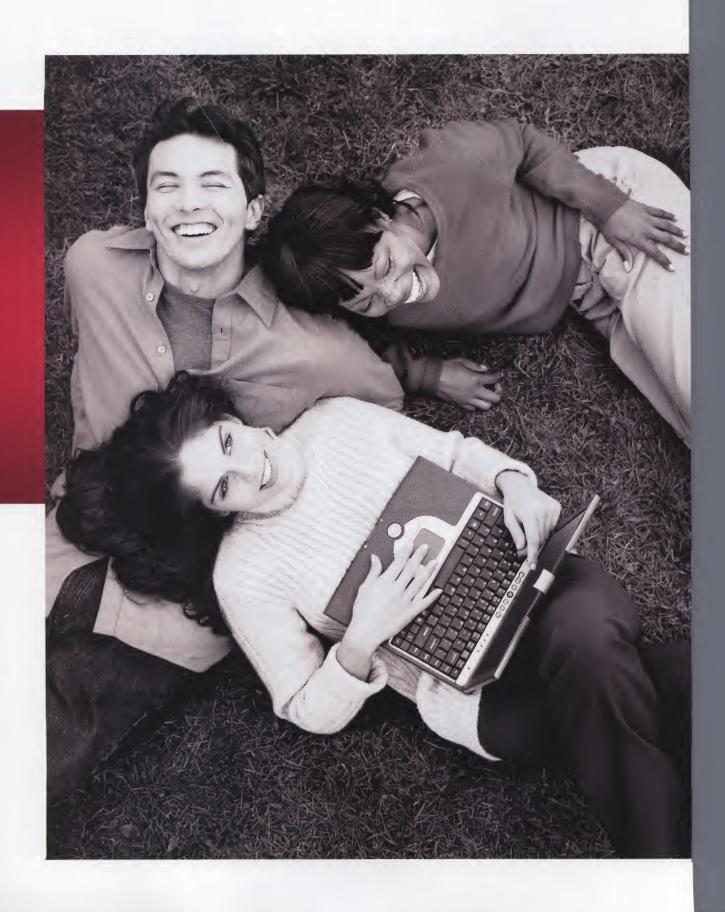
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they catalog, the resellers they list, the frequency with which they update pricing, and the amount of supplemental information they provide (such as tax, shipping costs, product reviews, merchant ratings, buyer's guides, and so on). What's more, not every portal lists every vendor on the Web. When you're searching for a specific product, you may want to visit two or three portals to



is potentially important for determining shipping times and the applicability of sales tax.

Another handy feature offered by some sites is price tracking. Suppose you've been yearning for a GeForce2 Ultra video card, but can't afford to spend \$400-plus. You

Finding What You Need

hether you're looking for the right digital camera, hard drive, or motherboard, the myriad choices could make even the most inveterate shopper dizzy with indecision. These Web resources will help set your head straight and put you on the fast path to the checkout page.

For starters, head to ZDNet (www. zdnet.com) and CNET (www.cnet.com) for hands-on reviews written by product experts. (CNET Networks, owner of ZDNet and CNET, is the parent company of Computer Shopper.) Both sites also allow visitors to add their own opinions, so you'll often be able to see ratings or reviews from fellow users.

Taking that idea a step further, ConsumerReview (www.consumerreview. com) and Epinions (www.epinions.com) are devoted exclusively to user-composed reviews. Like search engines, these destinations let you look for products based on keywords, or you can drill down through categorical lists. Neither is dedicated solely to computer gear, but you'll have no trouble finding nonprofessional reviews of mainstream hardware.

If you're more interested in help than opinions, click a few pages into About.com (www.about.com). In the Computer Peripherals section, you'll find subjects ranging from CPU upgrades to tape storage, with links to how-to articles, reviews, and information within each category.

Finally, you can try posting specific questions on Usenet newsgroups, the public bulletin boards frequented by users just like you. Start at Deja.com (www.deja. com), where you can search messages by keyword or drill your way into specific newsgroups (such as comp.hardware) to browse or post a new message.

cover all the bases.

"A shopping-comparison site that's really doing its homework should add significant value beyond price," says Dan Goldman, director of marketing for PriceGrabber.com (www.pricegrabber.com). "It should provide complete pricing information (that is, how much it will actually cost you to get the product to your door), in-stock BEST PRICE data, technical information, reviews of products and merchants, and other relevant content that helps you make the most informed decision."

CONVENIENCE

chant has an item in stock), and

know the price will drop eventually, although you don't know when. Some portals allow you to specify a desired price for an item, and will notify you by e-mail when the product hits that threshold. That's an immensely valuable feature and a definite shop-bot benefit.

> Even novice shoppers have probably discovered that shipping charges can seesaw wildly from merchant to mer-

> > chant, which can inflate bottom-line pricing.

That's one reason to use a portal that includes shipping charges in its price lists—something only a handful of them do. PriceGrabber.com, for instance, displays each merchant's product price and shipping charge based on your



ZIP code and tallies the two. It also figures in sales tax, if applicable. You know your out-the-door total up front, with no surprises once you've gone to the trouble of filling out the online order form.

Here's an example. Using PriceGrabber. com, we found a Sony Clié selling for the tantalizingly low price of \$303 at TechNetAmerica.com (www.technetamerica. com), a savings of about \$50 off the list price. However, a shipping charge of \$15.57, plus \$25 in sales tax, brought the total to \$343.57—still not a bad deal, but not the best one out there. At PCnomad.com (www. pcnomad.com), the Clié was selling for \$319.50, with neither sales tax nor shipping charges. The lowest product price isn't always the lowest out-the-door price.

If there's a caveat, it's that portals aren't always comprehensive in the sites they scour for pricing. Some portals, for instance, may leave out perfectly legitimate, but smaller, companies.

Another feature to watch for is breadth of shopping. A good portal should be stocked with a broad array of products. For instance, you might come to the site one day looking for a Nikon Coolpix 990, then return a week later to research DVD players. In the first visit, you want to get directly to the product you're looking for; in the second, you want to browse, learn, compare, and shop. "The best shoppingcomparison sites allow for both types of experiences and are optimized to accommodate them," says PriceGrabber.com's

First, we'll check out these types of portals, which are loaded with hardware such as digital cameras, PDAs, monitors, and CD-RW drives. Next, for those who are just as comfortable changing a jumper setting as clicking a mouse, we'll take a look at portals that can steer you to upgrade material such

COMPARATIVE

The best portals let you sort price lists using criteria such as price, merchant name, product availability (some bots show whether or not a mereven merchant location, which



as cases, power supplies, processors, and so on. And for those who need outside guidance in buying products, see the sidebar "Finding What You Need" for a wealth of decision-making resources.

PORTALS FOR THE PEOPLE

At a year-end holiday party, attorney Greg Pierce tinkered with a friend's Canon PowerShot S100 digital camera, liked it, and decided he had to have one. After shopping locally, he checked out PriceGrabber.com, one of the many mainstream portals that catalog a vast assortment of products.

"I found PriceGrabber to be very userfriendly," says Pierce, who saved about \$70 on the PowerShot by purchasing it from one of the many vendors the portal unearthed. "I especially liked the merchant-rating system," he adds, referring to PriceGrabber.com's inclusion of Gómez.com ratings for each reseller. This afforded Pierce an added degree of buying comfort.

Pierce's experience illustrates the value of shopping via portals, particularly comprehensive ones like PriceGrabber.com. The site lets you search by product name or drill



down through categorized lists, then presents an extensive, well-organized price comparison. The table shows the name of each retailer, the price of the product, any applicable sales tax, the cost of shipping (based on ZIP code), and the sum of these three figures. You also see whether an item is in stock and the merchant's Gómez.com rating (one to three stars).

PriceGrabber.com doesn't let you customize the way lists are sorted; they're automatically arranged by price, with the lowest appearing at the top. However, because the lowest product price isn't always the lowest total price, PriceGrabber.com takes the guesswork out of it by splashing a Your Best Price icon on the vendor with the best overall deal, shipping and tax included. Nice touch.

For the products themselves, the service provides the manufacturer's part number, any applicable rebate information, a review rating (taken from ConsumerReview.com, with a link to the appropriate page), a product description with technical specifications,



and, in some cases, a video demonstration. The site also lets you specify a target price for your item; when it becomes available, PriceGrabber.com will notify you by e-mail. Alternately, you can monitor all tracked products using MyPriceGrabber.

Although PriceGrabber.com appears to have a broad focus, with categories ranging from software to movies to toys, we found plenty of listings for more esoteric items like motherboards, cases, and floppy drives. To its credit, PriceGrabber.com includes photos of most of these items, as it does for virtually all big-ticket hardware.

The service isn't perfect, though. Its rebate center, for instance, isn't indexed, so you may have to click through dozens of alphabetized pages to hit upon the product you're looking for. And you can't sort that list, either, so you're stuck searching by vendor. Even so, PriceGrabber.com is one of the best places to start when you're looking for a broad range of computer gear.

Another outstanding one-stop-shopping destination is DealTime (www.dealtime. com), a portal that lets you comparison-shop for just about anything. Its categories include apparel, financial services, and pet supplies. Though it doesn't immediately look like a destination for technology shoppers, dig in, and you'll see that DealTime has an extensive section devoted to hardware. In addition to mainstream items like scanners and printers, you'll find motherboards and cases (although they're tucked into a rather misleading category called "performance upgrades").

DealTime delivers some amenities that make it a great place to shop. You can specify a price range in your product searches, a convenient feature if you're looking for, say, motherboards priced under \$200. Computer searches afford even more flexibility, allowing you to specify criteria such as processor

Shopping Showdown

ust how helpful are price-comparison sites? To put them to the test, we shopped for two disparate items: Compaq's popular iPaq H3650 handheld PC, and a motherboard for a IGHz AMD Athlon processor.

The iPaq was easy because we knew exactly which model we wanted, so the real challenge was finding the best price. First stop: PriceGrabber.com.

After a quick search, the price-comparison chart revealed an out-the-door total of \$486.91 from firstsource.com (www. firstsource.com). The site, however, earned a rather cautionary one-star rating from Gómez.com (www.gomez.com). That gave us pause, so we looked to the second-best price, which came from eCost.com

(www.ecost.com), a threestar merchant. Sold.

Just to be sure, though, we surfed over to DealTime, where we found similar numbers-but a different rating for firstsource.com (two stars instead of one). A visit to Gómez.com revealed that PriceGrabber.com displayed the correct rating, so we gave eCost.com our business.

Not surprisingly, buying a motherboard proved a bit trickier. At iBuyer.net, we clicked the motherboard link and were presented with a confusing set of subcategories: "440BX," "Slot A MBDs," and so on. All we knew was that we needed a motherboard to accommodate a IGHz AMD Athlon CPU.

So we put the search engine to the test, entering the keywords "Athlon motherboard." Bingo: The site found 32 matches, with the five most popular selections listed at the top. We chose an Abit KA7-100, which had a rating of 95 percent and links to nearly a dozen reviews on other Web

> sites. And that enabled us to see other customers' opinions of the motherboard before buying it based on price alone.

What we didn't get from iBuyer.net was a list of detailed specifications—only a cryptic description line that read like this: "KX133/686A 6PCI IISA IAGP 4DM 200FSB ATA100 AWARD BIOS." Novices need not apply.

speed and hard drive size. When you sign up for a free DealTime account, you can buy from select merchants without having to reenter your shipping and billing information, an appreciable time-saver. And the DealTime Mobile option lets you shop from just about anywhere using a Web-enabled mobile phone.

One problem with
DealTime, however: It claims to
include auctions and "buying
groups" in its searches, but
we didn't find links to
anything but Web merchants for all of the
computer items we
sampled.

Another mainstream comparison site with an extensive computer section is PriceScan (www.pricescan.com). Part of what differentiates it from PriceGrabber.com and DealTime is its detailed search parame-

ters. PriceScan assumes you know what category of product you're looking for, but not necessarily the models and specifications. Before you search for, say, a digital camera, you're asked to choose a manufacturer, the type of image sensor, the type and amount of zoom, whether or not it has USB connectivity, and so on. For a motherboard, you can specify chipset, number of CPUs supported, even the physical size. These are optional criteria; you can answer some, all, or none. The idea is simply to narrow your search so the resulting price list is more precise.

PriceScan works quite well, particularly when you're looking for a product with specific features but don't know which brands and models qualify. But its price comparison is rather sparse, listing only the vendor's name, the source of the product (usually only "direct from vendor"), and the price. Tabs on the list take you to a product photo, a price-trend graph, and product reviews. The reviews, submitted by visitors to the PriceScan site, tend to be few and far between.

THE PARTS DEPARTMENT

Hard-core chipheads seem to speak a different language than the average PC dilettante—and they have more esoteric shopping needs, too. Fortunately, several sites understand them and their product requirements, which often include gut-level components needed to build a system from scratch.



BEST PRICE

GP-V7100 GeForce2 MX

As of January 31

Graphics Card

www.telekomnet.com

Though many of these products can be found at mainstream portals, a better selection and, sometimes, lower pricing are available at portals that focus exclusively on computer parts. You can try sites such as

iBuyer.net (www.ibuyer.net), which offers a staggering array of choices for even the most obscure parts.

We searched for cases, for instance, and found nearly a dozen subcategories ranging from AT Desktop to Server Chassis. We drilled into ATX Tower and found upward of 100 cases, all divided by manufacturer. This listing definitely wasn't for novices; each product was cryptically described like the following: \$63.57 CASE BGE ATX MID 250W P/2 3 5.25 4 3.5 SMT-PWR FCC - KS280+PP253X.

Obviously, iBuyer.net assumes some knowledge and experience on the part of the buyer. Once you click any given link for a product, you're presented with a traditional portal-style price list. The site includes company phone number and state, shipping charges, product availability, the date of the latest price update, and even whether or not

the vendor supports international sales. Best of all, you can sort the list by any of these criteria. You're also given the option

of commenting on or reviewing a particular product, and viewing comments and reviews from others.

IBuyer.net earns
extra points for its
reviews and rebates
pages, which, though not
very well-organized, contain loads of useful information. Alternately, if you
view a price list for a specific product and a review

or rebate is associated with it, iBuyer.net provides the appropriate links. In the Reviews Center you'll also find links to technical and how-to articles covering topics such as building your own PC and setting up dual-boot configurations. Rounding out the service is a price-alert feature that will notify you by e-mail when a product price drops below a specified amount.

A no-frills portal, PriceComputing.com (www.pricecomputing.com) is nonetheless a good place to look for just about any computer part. Once you've clicked your way to the desired category—say, EIDE hard drives—you can then narrow the results by specifying criteria such as manufacturer, capacity, or interface type. The resulting price list includes stock status, vendor rating, and taxable states. If you're looking for extras such as reviews and product tracking, you're out of luck.

We'd be remiss if we didn't mention our own site, computershopper.com (www.computershopper.com), where you'll find an exhaustive selection of computer hardware. Search by brand, product, or price range, and you'll frequently find links to related reviews on ZDNet. Want to know which products have been viewed most frequently by other Computer Shopper visitors in the last week? A click on the Hot Products tab takes you to a categorized list, complete with links to prices and reviews. Though the price lists themselves list only shipping cost and stock status, few portals have ties to more vendors.

Another worthwhile stop is CNET Shopper (*shopper.cnet.com*), which spotlights mainstream hardware as well as harder-to-find upgrade gear such as I/O boards and unboxed processors. Its price lists include a wealth of useful information, including merchant ratings, phone

numbers, shipping charges, and the date the pricing was last updated. (CNET Shopper is

owned by CNET Networks,

Computer Shopper's parent

company.)



BEST PRICE

Canon PowerShot S100
Digital Elph
www.thedigitalsolutions.com

As of January 23

SHOPPING-CART BLANCHE

It's not hard to see the appeal of shopping portals. They're free, they're fast, and they're unequivocally helpful. Whether you're a newcomer to Web shopping or a regular online buyer for your company, you're likely to save consid-

erable time and money by leveraging these services.

Even if you have a favorite Web merchant or local computer store, it makes sense to start with a portal. At worst you'll have wasted a few mouse clicks, but at best you'll find significant savings on computer products. Chances are, you'll come out ahead.

Monarch Computer Systems



www.MonarchComputer.com 800-611-0875

3 Year Warranty on all AMD CPUs



- > Custom Built AMD Systems
- > High End Gaming Systems
- > Prebuilt Specialized Systems
- > Motherboard/CPU Combos
- > 2U Rack Servers

How To Shop Safe



Before you submit any sensitive or private information about yourself-especially your credit-card number-make sure that the data will be encrypted and transmitted over a secure connection. Both your browser and the Web site's server should support industry standards, such as Secure Electronic Transaction (SET) or Secure Sockets Layer (SSL).

Protect Your **Dasswarns**

Don't create a password based on information that can be easily discovered, such as your birth date, telephone number, or Social Security number. Instead, use a unique combination of at least five letters, numbers, or symbols.

protect your Drivacy

Take a moment to read the company's privacy policy, which should detail what information the site collects and how it will be used.

Limit your exposure by filling out online forms carefully. Don't volunteer optional information. Instead, provide only the information required to complete a transaction

Never divulge informationsuch as your mother's maiden name—that can be used to gain unauthorized access to your accounts.

Various free and fee-based Web services will let you surf and shop anonymously. For example, Anonymizer (www.anonymizer. com) or Privada (www.privada. net) will let you visit Web sites without revealing your name or e-mail address.

use an insured payment methoo

Paying for your online purchases with a credit or charge card isn't just convenient—it's smart. Your transaction is protected by the Fair Credit Billing Act, which gives you the right to dispute charges and to withhold payment until the dispute is settled. In addition, if your credit or charge card is used fraudulently, you are normally liable for only \$50 of the total amount.

Cash payments are increasingly common on the Internet, thanks to online auction sites. For large sums, you should use a fee-based escrow service, such as i-Escrow (www.iescrow.com) or Tradesafe (www.tradesafe.com).

CHECK PEFEPENCES Look for the Better

Business Bureau Online Reliability Seal (www.bbbonline.org), which guarantees that a company has been in business for a minimum of one year, has become a member of a local Better Business Bureau. and agrees to arbitration in case of a dispute.

BizRate (www.bizrate.com) conducts customer surveys and publishes ratings for categories such as quality of merchandise, quality of customer service, and timeliness of shipping.

Auction sites such as eBay (www.ebay.com) provide a feedback section, where purchasers can comment on the reliability of individual

CHECK THE TERMS of the sale

Reputable online retailers display the terms and conditions of the sale, including warranties on the merchandise, limitations of liability, and return and refund policies. Some sites dis-

20 Ways In HND SMAPTI N

play this information prominently on a "click-wrap" screen that requires you to accept the terms before completing the purchase. Other sites provide links to the information.

include taxes and SHIPPING

Scrutinize the shipping and handling fees tacked onto your bill. Per-item fees and expedited shipping methods can bloat the total purchase price. Look for sites that offer low-cost shipping methods or that deliver free of charge when you place a large order. Charging sales tax is required by law in many states.

DOUBLE-CHECK orner earms

Before you finalize a purchase, proofread your order form. Typos, such as typing "22" instead of "2," can be costly mistakes. If your shipping address differs from your billing address, there is no way for the vendor to confirm its accuracy, so double-check it yourself. You should also make sure that the pricing information you see onscreen is absolutely current and not an old price from a page that was cached on your system during a previous visit.

estimate the Delivery Dage

The seller should inform you of an approximate delivery date. Federal Trade Commission rules state that if the seller does not specify a time period in which the product will be shipped, the merchant must either ship the product within 30 days, or notify you of the delay and offer to cancel the order and refund your money.

complain about Problems

If you do experience a problem with an online purchase, notify the company immediately. Check the Web site for a toll-free phone number, an e-mail address, or links to customer service. If the companyitself does not resolve the problem, contact the Better Business Bureau (www.bbbonline.org), the Federal Trade Commission at

www.ftc.gov/ftc/complaint.htm, or your state attorney general's office (www.naag.org).

save time

1 Charge It

Don't pay by check: Always use a credit card or e-cash whenever you buy online.

2 Look for Seals

Look for seals of approval—from Yahoo, TRUSTe, and the Better Business Bureau. These ensure that the company is legitimate and that your personal information will be protected.

Get Help

When you have questions, use online customer-service support features, including online chat and voice-over-IP functions, as well as toll-free numbers.

4 Buy Big
Consider buying smaller items such as printer toner cartridges diskettes, Zip disks, and cables in volume to save money.

Save and Print

Save a copy of your online order receipt by saving the Web page locally. For extra security, print it out.

6 Clip and Save

Almost all vendors offer coupons and rebates, but few consumers bother to find them.

Track Your Delivery

Pay attention to shipping information and options to learn when your order is supposed to arrive. If at all possible, get a tracking number.

Buy Used

Check closeout or refurbished product sections. These often include amazing bargains. Just make sure they include some sort of warranty.

Search Smart

Use bots, or automated search engines, to compare prices among resellers. But be aware of possible bias—some bots are hosted by sites that also sell products.

Be Specific

If you know the name and model number, enter them for much faster searching.

Picture Your Perfect Customer: The Computer Shopper Reader



70% of Computer Shopper readers look at ads extremely/very closely—more than any other business title measured.¹

Extremely influential

87% of Computer Shopper Business Influencers recommend products or brands for purchase in their companies.²

Enormous reach

Computer Shopper magazine reaches **3.67 million** readers with every issue.⁴

Active buyers: online and off

Our readers enjoy the ease and convenience of online shopping— **86%** of Computer Shopper readers looked online for products/services in the last 3 months.²

Immediate purchasing plans

61% of Computer Shopper readers plan to buy software during the next 12 months.³

49% of our readers plan to buy desktop computers over the next 12 months.³

Big spenders

Our readers expect to spend \$340,215 in the next 12 months for computer products, exceeding the business influencer-market spending estimate of \$187,411!²



Be sure you get to know the Computer Shopper reader. He's certain to be a close family friend, business associate buyer of technology products and services that your company is looking for! An influential decision-maker and

expert PC user*, the Computer Shopper reader is everywhere—small office, home office, and corporate headquarters—and he's always on the lookout for good product value and the best that today's technology has to offer. Get to know him better by making him your newest customer with your ad in Computer Shopper!

Surpassing the readers of PC World, PC Magazine, Business 2.0 and Wired.

Online and offline, Computer Shopper delivers the buyers that grow your business!

Call 800.999.7467 for more information.





WEB TRAVEL

IF YOU'RE READY TO TRAVEL OFF BEATEN PATH, A FEW VIRTUAL TREKS MAY SAVE YOU SOME LEGWORK.

lready "done" the capitals of Europe in 21 days or less, turned right at every fountain from Paris to Prague, fulfilled your lifetime requirement of historic monuments? Perhaps it's time to get away from it all to a spot where your fellow travelers haven't already gone. First, cross Disneyland, Paris, and Six Flags Over Anything off your list. Next, eliminate everything billed as a "don't miss" destination, and anyplace already known to family and friends. When you finally find someone who says, "You're going where?" you're on your way.

But if no one-including you-knows much about this destination, how do you learn about it before you set out? The World Wide Web is the place to go before you venture into the great wide world. Why use the Web if you already have a travel agent? One reason may be your agent answered "true" to one or more of the following statements:

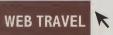
- ☐ Galápagos is part of the U.S. Virgin Islands.
- ☐ The Bayreuth Festival is a Middle Eastern religious holiday.
- ☐ Fiji is one of the major exporters of color film.

The Web may be the best guidebook for assistance on your journey down the road less traveled, and because it truly is worldwide, odds are good you'll find an informative site at trail's end. Even travel pro Kit Snedaker, who manages the Food/Travel Writers section of CompuServe's Journalism forum, turns to it for help. "I use the Internet to check hotels before I set out on a press trip and also to look for unusual sites for offbeat stories," she says. "It's a great resource, and I take full advantage of it." Thanks to the Web, Snedaker learned of an interesting emigration museum in Hamburg, a Jewish colony in Shanghai, and what to expect at Bangkok's Grand Central Plaza Hotel. Her work often appears at Forbes' FYI Signpost (www.forbes.com/fyi) and GoNomad (www.gonomad.com), and she's a regular contributor to Kafeniocom.com (www.kafeniocom.com), where you can even discover what Kafenio means.

The Web is also the place to find little details that fall under the heading of "Weird Stuff Your Travel Agent Won't Tell You." One good example is Donna



McSherry's Budget Traveller's Guide to Sleeping at Airports (www3.sympatico.ca/donna.mcsherry/airports.htm). Donna's site rates international airports, railroad stations, and other less-than-five-star crash pads you may encounter. With luck, you won't need her report, but it never hurts to know a little something about what to expect when the unexpected happens, which is often when you're off the beaten track.



date. (Check the date at the top of the page.) For instance, fishermen in Ecuador's Galápagos Islands harassed tourists for weeks in November, and an oil spill early this year caused some momentary concern. At press time, however, the State Department site made no mention of either incident.

source of destination information. A network of free bulletin boards accessible via the Internet, Usenet encourages spirited discussions. You can read Usenet newsgroups with a dedicated newsreader such as Microsoft's Outlook Express or on the Web at Deja.com (www.deja.com). If you're unfamiliar with newsgroups, Deja.com is the easiest way to go.

To find a list of discussion forums and message-subject links at Deja.com, type a short phrase in the Search Discussions box. A search for "adventure travel" may turn up more than 1,000 messages, though. To narrow your search, check only the relevant forum names and search again. Click any message subject to view its contents, then click the forum name just above the message. Chances are you'll find other messages on the same general subject.

Participants in these discussion groups are obviously interested in the area you'd like to visit. You may even be lucky enough to find someone who's just returned. By contrast, your travel agent may simply look up the destination, scan the list of local tour operators, and plug you into a slot that more or less fits what you want.

To see if the Web really could help us get away from it all, we took a few dry runs. You may not want to drop in on these same spots, but our experiences should give you a good idea of what to expect when you plug in your own destination.

It'S ALL IN CODE

If you need to track down an airport or airline code, or figure out what one stands for, the Web can help. Keep in mind some sources list only domestic airports, and some international code sources are more complete than others.

Oddly enough, the Federal Aviation Administration's site at www.faa.gov/aircodeinfo.htm isn't among the best. For instance, the international section has no entries for any of the Canary Island TXX codes, and even TVI, the code for Thomasville, Ga., doesn't show up on the domestic list.

The Airport Enthusiasts Hangar (www.house747.freeserve.co.uk) offers a

wider selection. The site provides both airport and airline codes, so make sure you select the right one. If you look for the airport code for Thomasville, Ga., under airline codes, for instance, you'll end up with the airline code for Tiramavia, based in the Republic of Moldova.

The FAA site offers a selection of metropolitan codes for cities served by more than one airport. Thus, if you don't care which New York City airport you fly from, select NYC for your next flight to MOW. Most travel and airline sites will know you want a flight from any airport in New York City to any airport serving Moscow (except for those in Idaho).

CAN YOU DRINK THE WATER?

Sometimes there are good reasons a place isn't popular. In these cases, the unexpected can often be unpleasant. Is it safe to drink the water where you're going? Or to go out at night? Or to travel without an armed escort? Or even to travel at all? The worst way to answer such questions is to go there and do these things. The best way is to ask around beforehand. Here's where the Web can help, if you know where to search.

For health advisories, try the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at *www.cdc.gov* and search for the country or region of interest. Check the U.S. State Department at *www.travel.state.gov* for

general passport information (which you may already know), visa requirements (which you may not), and links, some of which don't always work, to various American embassies. The Travel Warnings/Consular Info Sheets link is a great source for general background information on the places you plan to visit, although it may be weeks or months out of

So how do you find out what's really going on? One resource is the Epinions.com travel page at atlantic.epinions.com/trvl.

Select the appropriate destination link to see how the place rates in the eyes of recent visitors. You can also check people's epinions on airlines, oddly referred to here as "products." Or try a travel forum, such as portal.compuserve.com/compuserve/forum_center/travel.asp. Surf your way over to Travel Forum, select the message board for the area you want to know about, read the threads, participate in the ongoing discussions, and ask questions if you need more information.

Usenet newsgroups are another great

(WAY) SOUTH OF THE BORDER

We used the Internet to scope out a trip to al fin del mundo—the end of the world. (It's not really the end, but it's close enough.) Ushuaia is on the north shore of the Beagle Channel in the Straits of Magellan. Our round trip took nine flights and one three-day boat trip, but that's how it goes when one wanders off the beaten path. If you're planning a similar trip, you won't need the Web to get to the first stop, Santiago, Chile. But beyond Santiago, the path isn't always clear, and a bit of virtual homework can

help. For example, we'd heard vague rumors of a Chilean boat that wanders down the Pacific spine of South America from someplace to someplace else, but that was about all we knew. A search for various combinations of Chile, boat, and Ushuaia turned up hundreds of leads, but not what we needed to



know—the name of the company behind the boat. Here, a bit of guesswork helped. Most likely, the boat would sail from one Chilean port to another. That ruled out Ushuaia, which is in Argentina.

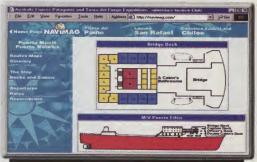
But Chile's Puerto Natales is reasonably nearby and seemed a likely destination candidate. Sure enough, a search on All the Web (www.alltheweb.com) using the terms "Chile Tourism" boat "Puerto Natales" turned up a half dozen hits. The blurb on the first hit read, "In the same hotel, the guests can hire



a number of optional tours...." Not much to go on—neither the hotel nor the site was identified. But the URL, www.navimag.com, sounded reasonably nautical, so we tried it. The home page displayed a graphic link to departures between Puerto Natales and Puerto Montt aboard the ship Puerto Edén. The site displayed deck plan, rates, departures, and other details that gave us all

the information we needed to plan this part of the trip.

Subsequent research on Ushuaia led us to a great little journey on el tren del Fin del Mundo—a narrow-gauge "train at the end of the world." Formerly used to transport convicts to and from their lives of hard labor, el tren now transports tourists within Tierra del Fuego National Park. The railroad



Information not easily found elsewhere, such as passenger accommodations on a Chilean freighter, turns up on the Web at the Navimag site.

A few more site visits, and we had most

of the information we needed to plan this

Once we conquered the sea, we were ready

boasts 10 coaches, five locomotives, two

stations, and one Web site (www.

trendelfindelmundo.com.ar).

little 15,000-mile junket.

FLY, FLY AWAY

galápagos via the web

We put to the test a handful of sites that specialize in adventure travel by checking their coverage of the Galápagos Islands.

AdventureQuest.com (www.

adventurequest.com) offers 1,400 adventure tours and extensive links make it easy to find a place of interest. Some Galápagos trips (via South America/Ecuador links) use the Lindblad Expeditions ship *Polaris*; others use various unidentified yachts.

Great Outdoor Recreation Pages (GORP, www.gorp.com) is a good source for general information on many locations. Its Galápagos page features a lengthy essay on birding and wildlife, good capsule descriptions of each island, National Park rules, and links to various packaged tours.

who can't face a day in the wild world without staying in touch with the wired world. Music lovers can download Fregata's "Symphony for the Birds," performed by the Galápagos Symphony Orchestra, from www.expeditions.com/radio_ad.html.

Luxury Link's (www.luxurylink.com)

Galápagos links lead to tours with "name" operators on ships such as the *Eclipse*, *Polaris*, and—according to one site—"the most luxurious ship sailing the islands, *M/V Santa Cruz.*" It's okay, but neither it nor *Polaris* is in a league with the truly luxurious *Eclipse*, nor with any vessel INCA offers.

Untamed Path's (www.untamedpath.

com) Galápagos information is questionable at best. "If you know there is a particular island or species of wildlife you would like to see, the boat operators are generally quite accommodating." On the contrary, your boat has permission to follow its posted itinerary; deviations are not allowed. The page also shows photos of a frog and a green iguana, neither of which are Galápagos residents. The site's best point may be its list of Informative Links elsewhere.

Navigation Note: Some destination pages at AdventureQuest.com won't let your browser escape—unless you know the trick: Double-click the Back button quickly to break the loop. Lindblad's *Polaris* Deck Plan page also holds your browser captive, and here even the Back button offers no escape. Use the adjacent tiny black down arrow to break loose.

You can do your own ship inspection on the Web before deciding which one to book.

International Nature & Cultural Adventures (INCA, www.incafloats.com) specializes in Antarctica, Galápagos, Peru, and Turkey. The Galápagos page offers photos and ship-deck plans, as well as plenty of details on the various islands the ships visit.

Lindblad Expeditions' (www. expeditions.com) *Polaris* will offer shipboard services later this year to visitors

to take to the sky. Seventeenth-century mariners often reckoned longitude from the two-mile-high Pike of Tenerife in the Canary Islands, just off the coast of Morocco. The Pike is still there, of course, but 21st-century travelers without months

to spare will want to fly to the islands—assuming there's an airport handy.

To find out, we tried Expedia.com's

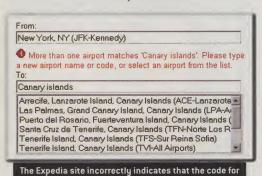
Express Search. Like many other travel sites, you have to plug in departure and return dates even if you haven't decided when to go yet. You must also specify morning, noon, or evening flights in both

directions.

The easy part was our departure point—New York's JFK Airport. But we knew neither our destination's three-letter airport code nor the time we wanted to depart, so we simply typed "Canary Islands" and chose a morning flight. Apparently there are five—maybe six—airports there, because Expedia insisted we select one from a list. We had no idea which to choose, but the last two looked promising because both were on Tenerife Island. One was listed as TFS-Sur Reina Sofia, the other as TVI-All

Airports. Does TVI include TFS, or does that really mean all airports *except* TFS? Who knows? We chose TVI. (See the "It's All in Code" sidebar.)

Next, Expedia had to know who's going on this trip—adults? seniors? children? infants? We didn't know what this had to do with whether the islands had plane service, but we played along. Next came the "Do you have any preferences?" section, where "no" is not an acceptable answer. You must



all airports on Tenerife Island, Canary Islands, is TVI.

It's actually the code for Thomasville, Ga.

choose economy, business, or first. We chose "first," as well as "only direct flights." Finally, we were forced into a flight-by-flight or best-fare selection.

In the end, Expedia reported nothing available with these, or any other options. Of course, we didn't really want to go to all airports—one would do nicely. So we tried TFS. Bingo! Expedia found several connecting flights, all departing at 5:30 p.m. or later. What happened to our forced morning choice? And if there are so many flights to one airport, why are there none to all airports? We thought it best not to worry about it. The folks in Thomasville, Ga., may worry, however: TVI is really the airport code for their corner of the world, which may explain why Expedia couldn't find a flight there from JFK.

HOW MUCH?

We thought we'd get the best ticket price by not being picky about departure point, so we asked Expedia com to quote a round-trip fare from any airport in New York City to our destination and back on January 9 and 23. Its first choice was an Air France/Iberia combination departing Newark with a transfer in Madrid for \$850.87. Or for \$65 more, we could fly home via Madrid and Philadelphia—part of a pay more/get less plan. We decided against it, and wondered why there were no American Airlines fares, because the company serves Madrid. To double-check,

WEB TRAVEL

we narrowed our departure point to JFK only, and now Expedia came up with a Delta/Iberia combo for only \$718.62. The site also proposed KLM/Iberia for the outbound legs, and a return on Air Europa for \$3,643.60. No, thank you.

American Airlines was still among the missing, so we went directly to its site (www.aa.com) and found 10 choices, two of which put us on a flight to Madrid. But how much would this cost? American wouldn't say, because, according to the site, "Either your departure or your origin airport is not serviced by American Airlines. Therefore, we are unable to fulfill your request to choose by price."

We decided to check out the competition, and surfed over to United Airlines (www.ual.com), where we found promising signs of intelligent virtual life. This is one of the few sites with an "Anytime" option, and also the lowest fare yet: \$714.

Next, we tried Travelocity.com (www. travelocity.com), where, at first, the best we could do was \$723.90 on an all-Iberia ticket for the dates we'd chosen. But the site's "any date" option did United Airlines one better, leading to a tempting \$566 fare. We had to play calendar roulette to find dates on which that fare was available, however, and eventually found available flights on Jan. 23 and Feb.19. We also noted the fare was not quite as good as it seemed; the itinerary report tacked on an additional \$58.90 for taxes/fees/airport charges. Nevertheless, this was still almost \$100 better than Expedia's \$718.62. We wondered whether Expedia could meet this fare if we gave it the same dates. No: Now it offered two fares only: \$810.62 and \$2,148.10.

The lesson? Be sure to compare flights and prices you find online, even at the travel-comparison sites.

IT'S A JUNGLE IN THERE

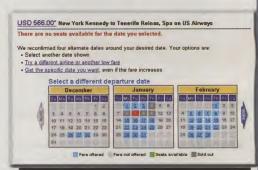
Another lesson you may learn from all this: To find the road less traveled, you have to traverse a virtual jungle. You can find a lot of gems if you know where to look, but you'll also encounter dangers—not lifethreatening, but you do need to keep your eyes wide open and read carefully between the lines.

Sometimes it's easy to get a straight answer: "Do I need a visa for Venezuela?" (No.) Sometimes the answers are not so easy: "How do I get there from here?" (You can't.) A knowledgeable travel agent would

know in an instant about the plane that goes where you want to go, without subjecting you, as a Web site might, to a stream of inane questions that have nothing to do with anything you're interested in. On the other hand, the agent may be less than aggressive in sniffing out the best deal. But on still another hand, the same agent may suggest an attractive alternative routing that doesn't show up on the fast-but-mindless Web. Both virtual and real agents may offer a voyage on a ship with no name, or accommodations at an unknown hotel in an unknown town.

This is where the Internet's informal travel forums can be a godsend, helping you find recent visitors who can give you the skinny on the local scene, and maybe even a comment or two about the tour operator you're considering. You may also get some impressions of a ship that doesn't have a CDC or U.S. Coast Guard inspection report, as in the case of Navimag's *Puerto Edén*. Remember, though, that what you read is not an "official" report. If possible, read a few comments before making a final decision. If it's a go, then write your own report when you get back.

When it's time to part with serious cash,



Some calendar roulette on the Web eventually led to this lowball fare at Travelocity.com. Our first choice (highlighted in red) wasn't available, though.

will you have reservations about making reservations over the Web with some presumably-honest-but-who-really-knows operator in a distant land? If so, that's your cue to take your virtual data back to a brick-and-mortar agency. The combination of Internet research and a real human to put it all together has proven unbeatable when it's time to get away from it all. So put that fancy brochure in the fire, and go fire up your browser. If you have trouble finding your way at first, you'll know you're headed in the right direction. Or as Robert Frost once put it:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less traveled by,
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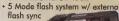


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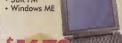
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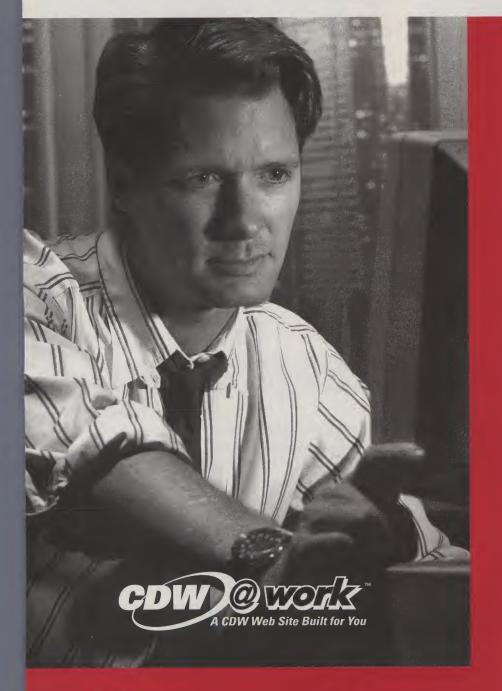
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Check out these sites to treat your PC to a first-rate spring cleaning, inside and out.

by Wendy Sheehan

pring is in the air, bringing with it the annual urge for cleanliness and order. And that's a good thing because, chances are, your PC is as cluttered as your closets. So hit the Web, and with just a few clicks transform that slow, cranky machine back into the speed demon it once was.

It's easy to see those coffee splatters on the keyboard, and if you really squint, the cookie crumbs dwelling underneath your space bar. But it's far more difficult to spot all the junk files that have taken up residence on your hard drive. A good place to start is www.belarc.com, where you can download the Belarc Advisor, a free, secure Web client that not only identifies your system's hardware components, but also lists installed programs and tells you exactly where

they reside on your hard drive. Print these reports and get down to business.

Once you see that you're hosting programs and associated files from days of Windows 95, you'll want to find a good uninstall utility-and don't think Windows' own Add/Remove Programs feature will do the trick. Symantec Corp.'s \$39.95 Norton CleanSweep 2001,

downloadable at www.symantec.com, will scrub your hard drive squeaky clean by scanning your system and removing unwanted programs and files. The Uninstall wizard provides step-by-step instructions for removing old or unwanted programs and their associated files, and the Internet Sweep component will clean the innumerable junk files you've accumulated from all that Web surfing. Fast & Safe Cleanup will remove temp, redundant, and other files you no longer need with the touch of a button (immediately, or on a schedule that you specify).

Best of all, CleanSweep will tell you exactly what

you can and cannot safely delete, making it ideal

for even the most clueless of users.

> Better yet, for just a few bucks more you could let the \$59.95 Norton SystemWorks 2001 4.0 do all the dirty work. The suite includes a full version of CleanSweep, plus Norton's trusted Utilities and AntiVirus components, which are designed to help keep your PC running smoothly all the time.

Subscribe to McAfee.com Clinic (\$29.95 for one year at www.mcafee.com/cybermedia), and you'll gain access to hard drive housecleaning

> helpers with fairly selfexplanatory names such as QuickClean, FileWipe, and Application Remover. Should you become overzealous in deleting your apps, you can always fire up the Application Restorer. McAfee.com Clinic also includes maintenance and optimizing tools for virus scanning, as well as online

first aid. The Oil Change Online feature has a nifty software-upgrade

finder that scans your system and scours the Web for upgrades, updates, patches, and addons; its hardware-upgrade analyst advises which peripherals need an upgrade.

If you don't want to part with the cash for a catch-all optimizing solution like those mentioned above, you can find a bevy of free (or at least free-to-try) downloads that will fine-tune your system and help boost performance. Speedlane's SpeedWiz 4.02 performs system tweaks to optimize virtual memory and speed Web access

(www.zdnet.com/downloads; free to try, \$25.99 if you decide to keep it). Another great resource is Silicon Prairie's MemTurbo 2.0, which kick-starts performance

by increasing available RAM on your system and performance-tuning your file caching (www.cnet.com/ downloads; 30-day free

Now your hard drive is clean as a whistle, but a true clean freak wouldn't neglect the printer,

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the best ways to tidy up-and supercharge performance-is by sweeping out old drivers and replacing them with the latest versions. Start your quest at DriversHeadQuarters.com (www. drivershq.com) to pick up DriverDetective 2.0. This free program will help locate current drivers for all your devices and tell you where to get them. You'll also find an easily searchable driver database, free backup software, and step-by-step driver-install guidance. Other driver destinations include Driver-Guide.com (www.driverguide.com) and WinDrivers.com (www.windrivers.com), which both offer comprehensive, searchable databases and free advice on finding and installing drivers.

You've done the hard work to clean up the inside of your PC. Now it's time to tackle those coffee splatters and cookie crumbs. For a wide selection of cleaning products, head to CleanSweepSupply (www.cleansweep supply.com). Here you'll find keyboard cleaning kits, precision compressed-air blowers, miniature vacuums and antistatic surface and one-step CRT wipes, as well as supplies to clean mice, printers, and disc drives. If you order more than \$30 worth of cleaning gear, you'll get free shipping, not to mention a PC that sparkles Suck it up: Make your on the outside, too.

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- Midnight Grey Standard Color Palm Rest Kit with Four Colors: Golden Yellow, Tahoe Blue, Storm Grey or Royal Purple, add \$19
- NEW Iridescent Jade or Iridescent Bronze Palm Rest Kits, add \$39 each

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Wireless Options:

- Dell[™] TrueMobile[™] 1150 Wireless Networking PC Card, add \$129
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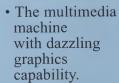


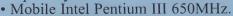
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B7G7ZX1Gigabyte GA-7ZX-1	\$104.95



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SITE REVIEWS FOR ONLINE SHOPPING

BY KEVIN SAVETZ

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PC SHOPPING

The sites in this listing sell computers, components, and accessories from multiple manufacturers. See the sites under "PC Direct Vendors," or check the Computer Shopper Source Directory (cgi.zdnet.com/slink?8145) for more information on PC manufacturers offering only their own brands (such as Dell and Gateway).

aberdeeninc.com

Targeting the savvy consumer who craves speeds and feeds, Aberdeen offers extensive specs on a wide variety of computers and accessories. Shoppers can see side-by-side comparisons of motherboards the company carries.



accessmicro.com

Need a gift for that special someone who has everything? Check out Access Micro, which stocks tons of items ranging from T1 routers to complete desktop systems. The help desk and hardware guide provide aid to

first-time visitors, and the new clearance area offers returned items and old inventory for below wholesale

www.applied-computer.com

Selling PCs and supplies since 1984, Applied Computer promises to beat any advertised price. The company features a mind-blowing 800,000product inventory-check the site's list of the 1,000 most popular ones. Beware of the handling fee tacked onto orders under \$200.

blackbox.com

Get connected! Specializing in network products, Black Box's extensive 900-page catalog of storage, cabling,

and surge-protection products-plus other connectivity accessories-can be viewed online or off.

buy.com

Among the products offered on this monstrous, multifaceted site are computers, electronics, books, and movies. Buy.com sells a whopping 850,000 items and offers a price-matching policy on most of them.

cdw.com

CDW offers an enormous array of hardware and software. Create sideby-side comparisons in many product categories, and search out dollar-saving deals on the rebates-and-coupons

compgeeks.com

Revenge of the nerds, indeed! Shop the Computer Geeks Discount Outlet for discontinued and refurbished computer gear. It's a trove for the do-it-yourselfer piecing together a desktop system. The site features low prices and complete specs on every product.

compuplus.com

Comp-U-Plus offers top-of-the-line customer service, including a 30-day money-back guarantee and free technical support. Its catalog isn't earthshattering in scope, but plenty of name brands are represented, and prices are reasonable.

compusa.com

The well-organized CompUSA rounds out the usual selection of PC hardware, peripherals, and accessories with areas devoted to electronics and gadgets. The frugal won't want to overlook the site's clearance section.

www.computergate.com

In business since 1991, Computer Gate offers a 30-day satisfaction return policy on its products, which include peripherals and built-to-order PCs. Check out the Quick Index: You'll never have to poke around for the right product again.

computers4sure.com

The 17 well-stocked departments at Computers4Sure.com include networking equipment, peripherals, PDAs, scanners, and more. Bargain hunters can quickly sniff out deals on the Special Offers and Clearance pages.

computershopper.com

Computer Shopper's own piece of cyberspace provides access to product reviews, interactive guides to choosing a desktop or a notebook, and How to Buy sections for the most popular product categories.

APRIL

cyberrebate.com

At CyberRebate you'll find more than 3,000 products that come with a 100 percent rebate, plus thousands more that offer partial rebates. The site's diverse catalog includes computer hardware,

electronics, health and beauty items, jewelry, and toys.

You'll definitely want to take advantage of the rebates on anything you purchase at this site because most of the inventory is grossly overpriced without the refund. For instance, \$130 for 25 CD-RW discs is costly, but with a 100 percent rebate it becomes a very attractive offer. Frequent free-shipping specials sweeten the deal even further.



Note that you'll need to be organized, diligent, and patient when shopping CyberRebate. The rebate process takes time and effort, and though the orders may arrive quickly, the rebates will not. In other words, you'll get the credit-card bill before the rebate check arrives.

To claim your refund, you'll have to download and print a

page or two of forms, fill them out, clip the UPC from the product box, and snail-mail the bundle back to the company. The site estimates it takes 10 to 14 weeks to receive the rebate; in our tests, checks arrived 14 and 15 weeks after we sent the forms.

CyberRebate backs each product with a 30-day no-questions-asked return policy. A helpful customer-service area displays the status of your order and rebate.

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Gómez.comwww.gomez.com

www.computersurplus outlet.com

You're just crazy enough to build your own desktop system, aren't you? Then you'll feel right at home at Computer Surplus Outlet, where you'll find closeouts, overstocks, refurbished equipment, and liquidation items. You can even stumble upon the occasional assembly-required Pentium system for less than \$100.

crucial.com

One of the largest providers of memory upgrades on the Web, Crucial Technology offers nearly 50,000 upgrade options for 10,000 computer systems. The site's Memory Selector helps buyers find the right product, and the company backs its memory with a lifetime warranty.



cyberwarehouse.com

If you can't pass up a bargain-basement sale (and don't mind waiting a

few days for your item to ship). CyberWarehouse is definitely for you. The site offers a small selection of PCs, monitors, and other peripherals.

dalco.com

Dalco Electronics stocks everything from motherboards to monitors, ships them the day you order, and includes a 30-day guarantee. Bargain hunters will want to start with the specials found on the home page, which change regularly.

dartek.com

With a roster of more than 100,000 products, Dartek peddles an impressive selection of hardware, software, networking equipment, and office furniture. Well-designed features include printable spec sheets, customers' product ratings, a product-watch feature, and a frequent-buyers' club.

dirtcheapdrives.com

If you can store data on it, this site sells it. Dirt Cheap Drives offers hard drives, CD-ROM and DVD hardware, and drive arrays, with detailed technical information about each product. This decadeold company also stocks mounting kits, media, and accessories.

ecost.com

The eCost.com catalog spans the full range of PC hardware and software, including ready-to-use systems, peripherals, accessories, and applications.



REVIEWS

The site features personalized product recommendations and fastidious organization.

egghead.com

Egghead.com shoppers can browse the site's hardware, software, officeproduct, and electronics superstores. Corporate users will find volume pricing, leasing information, and software licensing in the business center.

www.electrified.com

Need a serious bargain? Electrified Discounters specializes in products that are discontinued, second-inventory, refurbished, off-lease, or otherwise past their prime. Systems range from new Pentium II laptops to under-\$200 used 486s. (Wear your sunglasses, however-this site is so garish it can be difficult to navigate.)

elinux.com

At eLinux you'll find 42,000 hardware and software products for users of the Linux operating system. The site is so serious about Linux, many of its desktop and notebook systems don't come bundled with that "other" OS. Features include Linux news and a community

www.firstsource.com

Focused on the technology needs of businesses, Firstsource offers a broad range of choices in computer hardware, rack-mount systems, network tools, phone systems, wiring, and software. Real-time online customer service is available.

globalcomputer.com

Global Computer Supplies features same-day shipping on a Godzilla-size selection of PC components, accessories, software, furniture, and media. "Showrooms" highlight products from featured manufacturers. Watch out for the 15 percent restocking fee on nondefective returns, though.

gogocity.com

You'd think GoGoCity.com would be the one-stop-shop for knee-high boots, hot pants, and all things "gogo." Not so fast, slick. This site actually features desktop and notebook computers, peripherals, software, and accessories. The strangely diverse product categories also include children's items and interior-decoration products.

insight.com

With more than 100,000 items for sale, Insight offers an impressive catalog of hardware and software. Sign up for one or more of the 100 free newsletters featuring bulletins on new products, closeout specials, and tech news. Customized sites are available for shoppers in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Germany.



www.jandr.com

Hardware, software, home-office products, and appliances abound at J&R Computer World, the New York Citybased superstore famed for its selection and, ahem, "brusque" service. Avoid the attitude with this online version, which specializes in camerasboth digital and traditional film models. Product help is available via e-mail, online chat, and phone.

laptoptravel.com

Laptop Travel is road-warrior heaven! The site sells portable-computing and international-travel gear, including electrical adapters, modem converters/ couplers, and security accessories. You'll find traditional and "camouflaged" laptop carrying cases, laptop RAM, and storage add-ons.

thelinuxstore.com

TheLinuxStore offers a small selection of "penguin-powered" hardware and software that's compatible with the popular alternative operating system. The community area offers Linux news, free downloads, and Web links.



mcglen.com

McGlen Micro's specialized searches can help you find memory and other accessories compatible with your computer, printer, or copier. With the Build-To-Order Configurator, shoppers can design a custom system, which the company will configure and ship to you in two days.



mediasourceinc.com

Media Source is obsessed with storage media. This single-minded site sells CD-Rs, bulk floppies, optical discs, Zip disks, Jaz disks, DATs, and tons more. The selection of writable CDs includes brand-name and generic disks, business-card CD-Rs, and printable media.

megahaus.com

MegaHaus bills itself the "drive authority," offering a wide variety of storage solutions, including hard drives, DVD drives, RAID arrays, and CD-mastering products. A tech-info area features FAQs and specifications on hardware ranging from DVD players to drive brackets.

mei-microcenter.com

MEI-Micro Center offers new and refurbished desktops from Compaq, eMachines, Hewlett-Packard, and PowerSpec. You'll also find a small selection of peripherals. Rummage through the bargain bin for deals on closeouts, refurbished units, and overstocks.

memman.com

All of the desktop and laptop memory sold at **Memory Man** carries a lifetime



warranty, and the site's reference guide offers RAM-configuration info for all name-brand computers. The site also sells processors, motherboards, hard drives, heat sinks, and more for intrepid system builders.

memory4less.com

Memory4Less.com offers low prices on a wide variety of RAM, including older types you may have been pulling your hair out to find. If you don't know the memory requirements of your computer or digital camera, this site will clue you in.

microx-press.com

MicroX-Press offers detailed information about most products, as well as a handy feature that will send you an e-mail whenever a product's price drops below a limit you set. Customers are invited to rate and review products they've tried.

www.mobile-mania.com

Don't freak out, kids! Cut back on the sugar intake, and head over to **mobilemania.com,** where digital cameras, e-mail devices, PDAs, cases, and adapters of all sorts are available for folks on the go.



mobileplanet.com

MobilePlanet is home to a gaggle of high-tech tools and toys for mobile professionals. The selection includes handheld and notebook computers, PDAs, wireless-communication products, and travel-size printers and scanners. Rotating 3D images offer views of many products' least flattering sides.

motherboards.com

With a wide selection of motherboards from 10 manufacturers, do-it-yourselfers can handpick the perfect innards for their new PCs at Motherboards.com. Customers can post product reviews, dinging those models that just don't live up to the hype.

www.mwave.com

In addition to PC systems and peripherals, **Multiwave Direct** stocks note-

SITE REVIEWS

book accessories, videoconferencing equipment, and network tools. Top sellers, "blowout specials," and rebate forms are a click away from the home page.

neutronet.com

Neutron carries thousands of computer systems and peripherals from nearly 400 manufacturers and distributors. A handy toolbox offers easy access to best buys, help for first-time buyers, and a massive manufacturer directory.

notebooksuperstore.com

Devoted exclusively to portable computers, **NotebookSuperStore.com** sells more than 50 different laptop models from nine manufacturers. You'll see technical details about each model, and a comparison tool helps you zero in on the best portable for your needs.

onvia.com

Onvia.com, a business-to-business computer outlet, offers a handful of features that distinguish it as a small-business resource, including a



WIRELESS RESOURCES

cellmania.com

Shopping for wireless gear can be tangle-free. **Cellmania** has lots of advice on purchasing wireless products and services, and provides a directory of mobile-enabled Internet sites. You can even access the site from your WAP-compatible phone.

decide.com

Did you ever have to make up your mind? **Decide.com** can help, offering comparisons of cellular phones and services, long-distance plans, and calling cards. Get a customized comparison of wireless services based on your particular usage patterns.

mobile.yahoo.com

PDA and pager users may never put their gadgets down after signing on to **Yahoo Mobile.** The site sends stock info, weather, and e-mail to your mobile device. Yahoo by Phone *(phone.yahoo.com)* lets you listen to your e-mail from any telephone.

thinkmobile.com

News on the go! **Thinkmobile** carries breaking news, an index of products and services, and articles for mobile-device users and developers. Newsletters offer tips for Windows CE, Palm, and Psion devotees.

wirelessadvisor.com

Give your ZIP code to **WirelessAdvisor.com**, and the site goes to work, compiling a list of wireless, cellular, and digital PCS phone companies serving your area. Articles explain the difference between analog and digital service, as well as tell how to choose a wireless plan. Confused? Check the comprehensive glossary of wireless-communications terms.

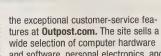
wow-com.com

Welcome to **The World of Wireless Communications.** Here consumers find tips on picking a phone and service, answers to questions about wireless products and health, and a guide to safe driving while on the phone. If you've wondered how your cell phone and pager work, this site will demystify the magic.

REVIEWS

outpost.com

Free overnight delivery and a 30day money-back guarantee are among



and software, personal electronics, and office products.

palmgear.com

Users of handhelds will appreciate the extensive selection of free and commercial programs downloadable from PalmGear HQ. Shoppers can buy PDA hardware and accessories, including carrying cases and hip, fashion-forward styli. Sign up for an e-mailing list to receive news, specials, and user tips.

pcconnection.com

PC Connection offers nifty bargains on a colossal variety of PC and Macintosh products. Smart Selectors ease the searching process for shoppers looking for turnkey systems, cameras, printers, monitors, or memory to fit specific quidelines.

pcmall.com

Shoppers at PC Mall receive free lifetime technical support on the site's vast selection of computers, hardware, and software. The site's business-solutions forum offers corporate leasing and volume pricing. Apple-heads can find all their favorite Macintosh products at the Mac Mall sister site (www.macmall.com)

pczone.com

PC Zone carries an impressive selection of all things PC. You'll find links to a clearance area and other stores: Mac Zone and Electronics Zone. Printable rebate coupons can save you some cash.

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provantage.com

Provantage offers PC products from more than 1,000 manufacturers, including a large selection of books and training materials. The site's Personal Tracking List feature lets customers build a list of product

bookmarks, then monitor prices and availability.

qualityclick.com

Flea-market aficionados will love QualityClick.com, which offers the unusual ability to "haggle" for selected products. The store covers all the basics for PC users, including hardware, networking supplies, accessories, and software, and offers a build-toorder system configurator.

shopper.cnet.com

The CNET Shopper search engine takes the guesswork out of finding a deal on hardware, software, and accessories. The site tracks the prices of more than 200,000 products in 100 stores. (CNET Networks is Computer Shopper's parent company.)



shoppingplanet.com

Do-it-yourselfers will appreciate Shopping Planet's inventory of barebones systems, add-on cards, and kits. A section of the site specializing in software and hardware for the Linux operating system is available at www.shoppingplanet.com/cm/ linux.asp.

sparco.com

Looking for that something extra? Check out Sparco.com's list of products that come bundled with 'free stuff." The site stocks more than 130,000 products, and it offers a list of discounted items for students and faculty members of academic institutions

www.spidergear.com

SpiderGear offers new and refurbished computers, cameras, home audio and video products, and car audio items and appliances. A \$10 optional membership entitles you to reduced prices and an annual rebate.

www.ssdonline.com

At State Street Direct, shoppers will discover a huge selection of computers and imaging products. Digital-camera

E-BOOKS

amazon.com/ebooks

The browsing's good at Amazon.com, which sells e-books for use on Windows PCs, compatible with Microsoft Reader software. The catalog includes fiction, business, history, sci-fi, even children's books. An e-mail newsletter carries recommendations and info about new titles

audible.com

For your listening pleasure: Audible.com delivers digital "books on tape" that you can listen to on your PC or portable player. Audio programs include bestselling books, The Wall Street Journal, and popular magazines.

ebook-gemstar.com

EBook is the place to gather information about the RCA Rocket eBook portable reader. The site is home to featured titles, product and technical-support information, and e-book FAQs.

ebooknet.com

We're on the same page. EBookNet is a community for readers of electronic books that includes discussions about e-books and related technologies, an enormous directory of downloadable books, and information about tablet PCs.

ebooks.barnesandnoble.com

Taking a digital turn, Barnes & Noble carries e-books in three formats, which can be read online or off. The site's offerings include free and commercial titles, a side-by-side comparison of e-book reader hardware and software, and a helpful newcomer's guide to e-books.

gutenberg.net

Launched in 1971, Project Gutenberg is likely the longest-running e-book venture. This free site offers the full text of more than 3,000 public-domain books, articles, and other documents.

ibooks.com

Notable for its technical bent, ibooks.com sells more than 1,000 digital books on topics such as programming, databases, and multimedia. The books are in HTML format, and can be read online or printed for offline perusal.

mightywords.com

Casting a fairly wide net, with inventory including business books, technical and health titles, and brand-name fiction, MightyWords offers works from major publishers as well as self-published works. The documents require proprietary reader software that is currently available only for Windows.

shoppers will find many items of interest, including a gallery for comparing images taken with various cameras.

staples.com

Yeah, they got that. **Staples'** Web site offers a liberal price-matching policy on computer accessories, software, and office supplies. If you order similar items often, you can set up personalized shopping lists. The company can occasionally take its time shipping items out to you, though, so beware.



2for1inkjet.com

Searching for incredible deals on printing supplies? Check out 2 For 1 Inkjet, which offers two-for-one prices on toner and ink cartridges for every brand of inkjet and laser printer, copier, and fax machine. The company offers free shipping on larger orders.

3re.com

If you can tolerate hand-me-downs to save some bucks, check out **3Re.com**, which repairs and repackages factory-returned computers and electronic equipment. Offerings include desktops, notebooks, printers, monitors, network equipment, and software.

tccomputers.com

In business since 1988, **TC Computers** sells fully configured systems, motherboards, and name-brand peripherals. The company's specialty is motherboards: It tests each one before shipping and bundles a step-by-step installation video.

tcwo.com

Thompson's Computer Warehouse Outlet Center offers only a small selection of computer products. You may find only a dozen monitors or four CD-ROM drives, but the prices are fantastic.

techstore.com

TechStore.com offers hardware in dozens of categories and highlights monthly top sellers. The site also sells a wide range of software—everything from Microsoft productivity suites to children's titles.

thortek.com

A wide array of computer accessories awaits **ThorTek** shoppers. The site provides quick links to the "top 5" products in several categories, including hard drives, monitors, digital cameras, and CD-RW drives.

tigerdirect.com

TigerDirect's site offers 46,000 products, including custom-built computers that are tested and shipped within 48 hours. Up for a little adventure? Order a build-it-yourself custom PC kit, and let the fun begin!

truedataonline.com

True Data Technology stocks an



SITE REVIEWS

exceptional catalog of motherboards, hard drives, and other upgrades. The site also features communication essentials for businesses, including DSL equipment and telephony products.

www.usbstuff.com

USB Stuff specializes in Universal Serial Bus-equipped gadgets, including digital cameras, CD-RW drives, printers, modems, hubs, and input devices. Uh-oh: Poor site design makes navigation difficult. A sister site at www.firewirestuff.com stocks IEEE 1394-compatible hardware.

usedcomputer.com

Used Computer Mall is a marketplace for, you guessed it, used computer equipment. Shoppers can list hardware to sell, or look for items to buy using the free classified ads. The site will also help you appraise equipment.

warehouse.com

The four "warehouses" under **MicroWarehouse's** roof sell PC hardware, Mac products, datacomm components, and supplies. The site accepts corporate, educational, and government accounts, and offers business leases on many products.

PC DIRECT VENDORS

buyabs.com

Exceptional customer support on custom-configured desktop and notebook systems is the goal at ABS Computer Technologies. All systems include a 30-day money-back guarantee. Some computers are available with Linux preinstalled.

buy-atlas.com

Atlas Micro offers desktop PCs built around Pentium III, Celeron, and AMD processors. Buyers can use drop-down menus to build a custom configuration and are protected by a reasonable 30-day return policy.

compaq.com

Three arms of Compaq Computer Corp.'s site offer computers for everyone. See Compaq AtHome (athome.compaq.com) for home and home-office systems, DirectPlus (www.directplus.compaq.com) for business PCs and servers, or the

Compaq Factory Outlet Superstore (compaqfactoryoutlet.com) for big bargains. The site allows shoppers to test-drive Compaq systems running various operating systems.



cyberpowerinc.com

Each **CyberPower** PC includes a threeyear warranty and 30-day money-back guarantee. The site's service area includes downloadable drivers and lifetime tech support.

dell.com

Dell Computer Corp.'s electronic storefront has always led the way in terms of ease of use. The site is jampacked with detailed information that makes it a snap to match a machine to your needs. Each system is configurable to the nth degree via dropdown menus, and you can get quick access to online support customized for your PC.



www.fosa.com

Fosa's built-to-order notebook computers include a 15-day money-back guarantee with no restocking fee and lifetime technical support. We just wish the site didn't depend so heavily on the Macromedia Flash plug-in. Sheesh!

www.fujitsu-pc.com

Fujitsu's site focuses on portable computing, including notebook PCs and pen-based tablet computers. Each computer includes several warranty options. The site's Refurbished Outlet peddles money-saving deals.

gateway.com

One of the biggest players in online computer sales, Gateway's enormous and informative site sells custom-built desktops and portables, delivering them on time 98 percent of the time, according to BizRate.com.

hpshopping.com

At this site, Hewlett-Packard Co. sells its lines of desktop and notebook computers, handhelds, PDAs, digital cameras, and printers. Business leases are available, and the site makes repeat purchases easy for businesses and individuals.

ibm.com/shop

ShopIBM sells business and home computers, notebooks, servers, thin clients, networking equipment, and peripherals. The build-to-order option allows buyers to customize a new desktop PC. Linux is an option on laptop models.

idot.com

From low-cost budget models to powerful monster machines, iDot offers customized desktop and notebook computers with a good return policy. The iForum area includes tech articles and Q&A lists of interest to PC shoppers.

kaypro.com

You can design your own Pentium III desktop system at Kaypro, but the custom configurator doesn't offer as much flexibility as we'd like. The site's notebook

area carries a selection of Fujitsu portables.

microexpress.net

Micro Express offers built-toorder desktop and notebook computers featuring AMD and Intel processors. Each system includes a 30-day guarantee and a two- or four-year warranty. Business leases are available.

micronpc.com

One of the largest direct PC vendors, micronpc.com sells computers to home-office users, larger businesses, government buyers, and buyers outside the United States. The Factory Outlet offers refurbished and discontinued systems.

nutrend.com

Custom-configure a home or business desktop PC at NuTrend Computer Products. The company stocks a wide selection of machines running your choice of Intel or AMD processors. Each system comes with a three-year

sagernotebook.com

Specializing in notebook computers, Sager offers a variety of options, from budget machines to speedy multimedia units. Service includes a 72-hour repair-turnaround guarantee and lifetime free tech support. Business leases are available.

shopprostar.com

Each computer in ProStar Computer's line of notebook PCs is backed by a 30day money-back guarantee, a speedyrepair promise, and free tech support. The handy comparison tool helps buyers zero in on the best model for their needs



REVIEWS

sonystyle.com

SonyStyle sells Sony's line of VAIO desktops and notebooks, plus digital cameras, displays, and storage devices. The Xtras Direct section of the site carries add-ons for PCs, digital cameras, and other equipment.

store.apple.com

Apple Computer's online store looks just like an iMac, all shiny and clean. This well-designed site allows you to custom-configure any Macintosh computer and offers a wide array of Maccompatible software and accessories. Beware the one-click ordering feature, however-using it may be a bit too convenient for impulse buyers!

tiny.com

Britain's favorite direct computer seller is now targeting us Yanks. Tiny Computers' line of prebuilt desktop and notebook PCs includes models for professionals and first-time buyers.

unitedmicro.com

United Micro offers a unique degree of configurability with its desktop and server PCs. Choosy shoppers can, for instance, pick the motherboard model and brand of cooling fan. You can see pictures of each component before you build the system.

www.winbook.com

Focusing exclusively on portables, WinBook Computer Corp. offers machines with a 30-day money-back guarantee, a one-year warranty, and free technical support. Ironically, some of the site's best deals, the daily "Web specials," can only be ordered by phone.

windrover.com

Windrover serves up a 30-day return policy and three-year warranty for all of its prebuilt and custom-configured laptops. Optional extended warranties include express service and 24/7 technical support.

PC RESOURCES

cablemodeminfo.com

CableModemInfo.com serves up reviews of cable-modem and DSL hardware, plus tips on sharing a modem between PCs. The site can help you find a cable-ready ISP in your area.

consumersearch.com

ConsumerSearch collects abstracts of reviews for all sorts of products, including computers, appliances, sports equipment, and automobiles. Each abstract includes a citation (for magazine articles) or a link (for online reviews).

dailyedeals.com

DailyeDeals' coupon pages offer codes that will instantly shave \$5 to \$40 off the bottom line at major online retailers. The First Time area links to substantial discounts for first-time customers.



dcresource.com

The Digital Camera Resource Page is an unbiased, comprehensive source of information for digital-camera buyers and owners. Shoppers can glean necessary info from the FAQ page, buyer's guide, message boards, and reviews.

dealtime.com

DealTime.com is an independent comparison-shopping service. The site aggregates prices from hundreds of online merchants, auctions, and classified sites. Also, 21st-century shoppers can compare prices by cell phone or wireless PDA, thanks to the site's mobile service.

www.epubliceye.com

Watchdog ePublicEye.com serves up a rating site that helps shoppers choose online businesses that deliver the best customer service. Available in six languages, the site employs "secret shoppers" who patronize Internet businesses, conducting audits and rating the service of each

expertcity.com

Expertcity.com promises live, 24-hour computer assistance from real human beings. When you pose a question, experts across the Internet bid for your business. Read their profiles, compare prices, then choose the expert you like.

56k.com

See **56K.com** for a primer on 56Kbps modems, a price shopper for buying a modem at the best price, and downloads of the latest firmware. Read the buyer's guide and upgrade FAQ before buying a new modem.

www.ftc.gov

The Federal Trade Commission's Web site is packed with useful information about consumer fraud and how to avoid it—online and off. Articles address online auctions and how to protect yourself when shopping on the Net.

gomez.com

Gómez.com offers ratings and customer reviews of e-commerce sites in two dozen categories, ranging from Web-based computer stores to drugstores, apparel vendors to online brokers. Check the ratings on ease of use, customer confidence, and cost.

motherboards.org

Motherboard HomeWorld is packed with motherboard news, reviews, specifications, and tips. Its comprehensive database of 1,200 products includes driver information, technical details, and overclocking hints.



nextag.com

NexTag is a sophisticated buying service that can help frugal shoppers find the lowest possible prices on computer equipment, electronics, books, music, and videos. Entering your ZIP code allows NexTag to calculate shipping and tax for accurate pricing.

pdastreet.com

PDAStreet.com, a resource for users of Palm, Windows CE, Psion, and Visor personal digital assistants, offers message boards, software downloads, news, and product reviews.

pricepda.com

PricePDA.com is a price-comparison engine for buyers of personal digital assistants, accessories, and software.

Users can access the site anywhere via WAP-enabled cell phones.

rammatters.com

RAM Matters humorously explains how adding memory to your computer will make you more productive. You'll get help in determining the type of memory your computer requires, as well as installation tips.

scambusters.com

Busted! Internet ScamBusters is a site and newsletter aiming to help Net users avoid getting cheated. Each newsletter focuses on the latest scams to make the rounds.

usb.org

Check **USB.org** for technical information about the Universal Serial Bus, as well as answers to frequently asked questions and information about devices that use it. You'll find information for end users as well as developers.

windrivers.com

WinDrivers.com is a comprehensive archive of drivers and DLL files for hard drives, sound cards, scanners, and other hardware. The site also provides links to antivirus updates and BIOS upgrades.

www.worldowindows.com

World O'Windows is a collection of news, resources, and tips about current and future versions of Microsoft Windows. The site can be invaluable if you're considering upgrading or if your recent upgrade is causing problems.

SOFTWARE SITES

accountingshop.com

The Accounting Shop focuses on accounting software. Shoppers can choose from an extensive catalog of high-end, midrange, and small-business packages, and get rebates when upgrading from QuickBooks or Peachtree software.

atomicpark.com

AtomicPark.com specializes in business software, offering free shipping on all orders. Specialized product categories include voice-recognition software and fax applications.

beyond.com

Beyond.com presents software for PC, Mac, and PDA users. In addition



to traditional boxed titles, the site sells downloadable software from

major publishers and a respectable selection of computer hardware. (CNET Networks, *Computer Shopper's* parent company, is an investor in Beyond.com.)



TRAVEL SITES

all-hotels.com

Whether you're looking for a cozy B&B or just an inexpensive place to rest your head, **All-Hotels** can help. This directory of 60,000 online-bookable hotels has detailed information about each and photos of many.

egulliver.com

In need of a luxury cruise or an international holiday? Not every trip is simple enough to book yourself. To get you where you want to go, **eGulliver.com** links customers with "specialists"—travel agents with expertise in the type of trip you want to take.

expedia.com

At **Expedia**, travelers can book flights, hotel rooms, cars, vacation packages, and cruises. The FareTracker tool keeps tabs on price changes and sends e-mail alerts accordingly.

hotwire.com

Traveling on a budget? **Hotwire** promises deep discounts on airline tickets—if you're flexible. You pick the dates of travel and see the price up front, but you won't know the airline or flight times until after you make your purchase. You can get a great deal, though you won't earn frequent-flyer miles.

revelex.com

Revelex.com will sell you airline tickets to your desired destination and help you find something wonderful to do while you're there. "Destination guides" house information about attractions in, and the history of, U.S. and international cities. You can also book a hotel room and reserve a rental car.

travelite.org

The **Travelite FAQ** has lots of tips on traveling light. Give in to your wanderlust with just a carry-on bag and without the worry of losing checked bags. This site reviews luggage, gives wardrobe selection tips, explains electrical adapters, and more.

travelocity.com

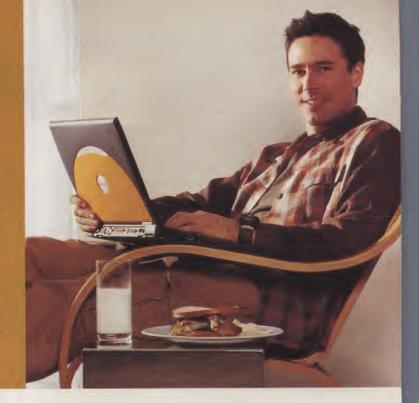
Travelocity.com offers something for everyone, from business travelers to cruise aficionados. Check the Fare Watcher to keep abreast of changing airfares, then use the Vacation Finder to discover the perfect getaway.

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DELL™ NOTEBOOKS:

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- Intel® Celeron™ Processor at 600MHz
- 12.1" SVGA TFT Display
- 64MB 100MHz SDRAM
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- Internal 56K Capable⁶ FaxModem
- Li-Ion Battery with ExpressCharge™ Technology
- MS® Works Suite 2001 MS® Windows® Me
- 1-Yr Limited Warranty² 1-Yr Mail-in Service
- 1 Year of DellNet[™] by MSN[®] Internet Access¹⁰ Included

\$1199 or as low as \$36 per mo. 45 mos.12 No payments for 90 days. E-VALUE Code: 05977-800311

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- Internal 56K Capable⁶ FaxModem
- Li-lon Battery with ExpressCharge™ Technology
- MS* Works Suite 2001 MS* Windows* Me
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 1 Year of DellNet™ by MSN® Internet
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- PC Speakers
- 56K Capable® PCI DataFax Modem
- MS® Works Suite 2001 MS® Windows® Me
- 1-Yr Limited Warranty² 1-Yr At-Home Service⁴
- 1 Year of DellNet[™] by MSN[®] Internet Access¹⁰ Included

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- harman/kardon® Speakers
- 56K Capable PCI Telephony Modem
- MS® Works Suite 2001 MS® Windows® Me
- 3-Yr Limited Warranty² 1-Yr At-Home Service⁴
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- APC Pro8T2 SurgeArrest Surge Protector

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- SoundBlaster 64V PCI LC Sound Card
- harman/kardon® Speakers
- 56K Capable⁶ PCI Telephony Modem
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- 48X Max CD-ROM Drive SB Live! Value Digital
- Harman Kardon® HK-695 Surround Sound Speakers with Subwoofer
- Integrated 3Com* 10/100 Ethernet Controller
- MS® Works Suite 2001 MS® Windows® Me
- 3-Yr Limited Warranty² 1-Yr At-Home Service⁴ ■ 1 Year of DellNet[™] by MSN[®] Internet
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99 or as low as \$54 per mo. 45 mos.¹² No payments for 90 days. E-VALUE Code: 05977-500317

DELL™ SOLUTIONS:

SOFTWARE & ACCESSORIES

- Epson® Stylus 777 Color Printer, add \$99
- HP® DeskJet® 932C, add \$99 after \$50 HP® Mail-in Rebate38 (Reg. \$149)

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 APC Pro8T2 SurgeArrest Surge Protector, add \$39

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- Extreme Game Pack (Dimension[™] only)¹⁶, add \$99
- Family Game Pack¹6, add \$99

FINANCING & SERVICES

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Inspiron™ Notebook Service Upgrades:

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- 3-Yr Warranty² and 3-Yr On-site Service⁴, add \$219



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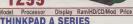
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Model Processor Display Ram/HD/CD/Mod Price LIFEBOOK SERIES

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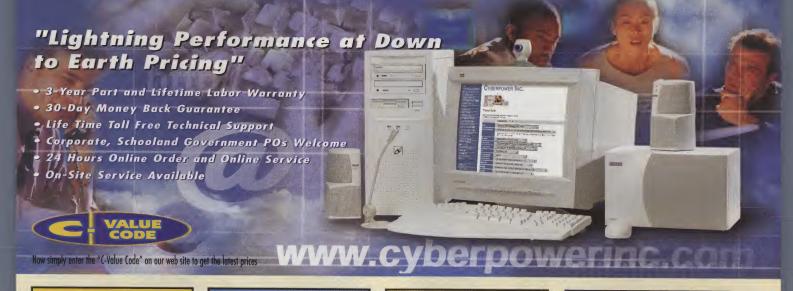
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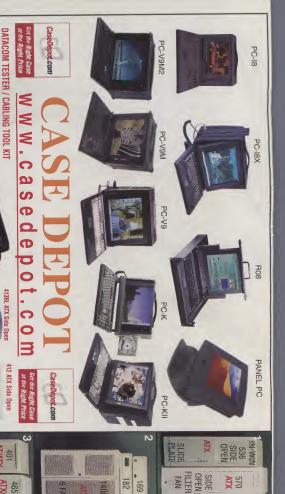
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WD200EB	20000	9.5MS/5400	2048K	3.5"/1"H	\$96				
WD200AB	20500	8.5MS/5400	2048K	3.5"/1"H	\$98				
WD200BB	20000	9 MS/7200	2048K	3.5"/1"H	\$107				
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WD300BB	30000	9 MS/7200	2048K	3.5"/1"H	\$133				
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IBM307030	30000	8.5MS/7200	2048K	3.5"/1"H	\$139				
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2048K

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3.5"/1"H

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9 MS/5400

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		1000013MS/4200 .			
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	IBM.	www.ibm.com			
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	IBMDJSA-210000	1000012MS/4200 .	512K	.2.5"/9.5MM	.\$114
	IBMDARA-212000	1200012MS/4200 .	512K	.2.5"/9.5MM	.\$149
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ST39216N 9200 5.8MS/7200 20	48K\$217
ST39216W 9200 5.8MS/7200 20	48K\$217
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ST318416N184005.8MS/720020	48K\$314
ST318416W 18400 5.8MS/7200 20	
ST318436LW184005.8MS/720020	
ST318436LWV184005.8MS/720040	
ST318404LW184005.2MS/10,00040	
ST318451LW184005.2MS/15,00040	
ST336704LW367005.2MS/10,00040	96K\$592
ST336704LWV367005.2MS/10,00016	
ST173404LW734005.6MS/10,00040	96K3.5"/FH\$1084
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TOSDW2002KIT	6X-24XDVDRA	MATAPI	120MS	8192K	\$439
	w.mitsumi.com				
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SONY. W		ATADI	05110	4001/	407
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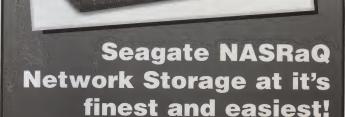
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45GB	5	9GB/7200rpm	ARR45-7EX	\$2189
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90GB	5	18GB/7200rpm	ARR90-7EX	\$2689
144GB	4	36GB/10,000rpm	ARR144-10EX	\$3039
200GB	4	50GB/7200rpm	ARR200-7EX	\$4599
300GB	6	50GB/7200rpm	ARR300-7EX6	\$6995

• SCSI R	AID-READY Drive E	nclosures w/DataP	orts •
#DataPorts	Interface	Item No.	Price
2	Ultra2 SCSI	FHCASEUSW	\$559
	4	UltraWide SCSI	DUAL
	CASEUSW	\$659	Director E
	8	Ultra2 SCSI	2/6
, particular of	QUADCASE8U2	\$1179	3
-	to 11		

RAID Suitable Enclosures These hard drive enclosures are perfect for RAID or multiple drive applications. They 4 Drive Desktop Model feature hot swapable drive (DUALCASEUSW) \$679

shuttles, and large cooling fans. These cases use a special backplane technology that allows you to use Wide

SCSI, Ultra Wide SCSI, or Ultra-2 LVD hard drives 7 Drive Desktop Model (QUADCASEUSW) \$1099 and the uniformal 8 Drive Desktop Model (QUADCASEUSW) \$1099 and drives and an (QUADCASEUSU) \$1379 add drives and an an electric property of the uniformal split pr

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SCSI CD ROM Drives .

Brand	Model	Max Spin	Speed	Internal	External			
Teac	CD532S	32X	85ms	\$72	\$132			
NEC	CDR3010	40X	85ms	\$69	\$129			
Plextor	PX40TS(tray)	40X	85ms	\$89	\$149			
Kenwood	UCR415	52X	90ms	\$139	\$199			
WIDE SCSI CD ROM Drives •								
Plextor	PX40TSUW	40X	85ms	\$99	\$189			
	 Atapi CD R 	ROM Dri	ves (ID	E) •				
Teac	CD540Ē	40X	85ms	\$43	\$73			
Mitsumi	CRMCFX48X	48X	65ms	\$39	\$69			
Acer	CD650P	50X	85ms	\$41	\$71			
Creative	SBCD52	52X	100ms	\$40	\$70			
Kenwood	UCR421	72X	100ms	\$95	\$125			
	· CD R	OM Tow	ers ·					

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• IDE CD Rewriters (Int. incl sft, 1R & 1RW disk) •

(CI(W1200A)	ゆ1/2
(CRX160EA1)	\$189
(C4502A)	\$195
(CDRW121032)	\$229
(PXW121032R)	\$229
(CDW512E/KIT)	\$215
(MP7120A)	\$189
(YCRW2100E)	\$229
(PXW1610TAR)	\$265
	(CRX160EA1) (C4502A) (CDRW121032) (PXW121032R) (CDW512E/KIT) (MP7120A) (YCRW2100E)

• SCSI CD Rewriters •

Sony 10x4x32 SCSI Int/Ext	(CRX145S/X)	\$279/\$339
Plextor 12x4x32 SCSI Int/Ext		\$279/\$339
HP 12x8x32 SCSI Int. (C4506A) w/sft,	1 R & 1 RW disk	\$295
Plextor 12x10x32 SCSI Int/Ext	(PXW1210TSB/X)	\$279/\$339
Yamaha16x10x40 SCSI Int/Ext	(YCRW2100S/X)	\$279/\$339

• USB & 13	94 CD Rewriters •	
Teac 4x4x6 USB	(CDW54EUSB)	\$249
Sony 4x4x6 USB	(CRX100E/X2)	\$279
Sony 12x8x32 1394	(CRX1600L/A2)	\$325

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CDR-	-74 in jewel case	
l6x	Budget 5/20/50/100 pack	\$5/\$18/\$42/\$78
l6x	Standard 5/20/50/100 pack	\$6/\$24/\$56/\$105
6x	Platinum 5/20/50/100 pack	\$6/\$24/\$57/\$106
Print	table CDR-74 in jewel case	
6x	Budget 5/20/50/100 pack	\$4/\$15/\$35/\$66
6x	Standard 5/20/50/100 pack	\$7/\$26/\$62/\$115
CDR-	-80 80 minute media	
6x	Budget 5/20/50/100 pack	\$4/\$13/\$32/\$59

CD REWRITABLE MEDIA

CDR-	CDR-74W in jewel case				
4x	Budget 5/20/50/100 pack	\$6/\$24/\$56/\$10			
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 CD Speed
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 Part #

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 48X/95ms
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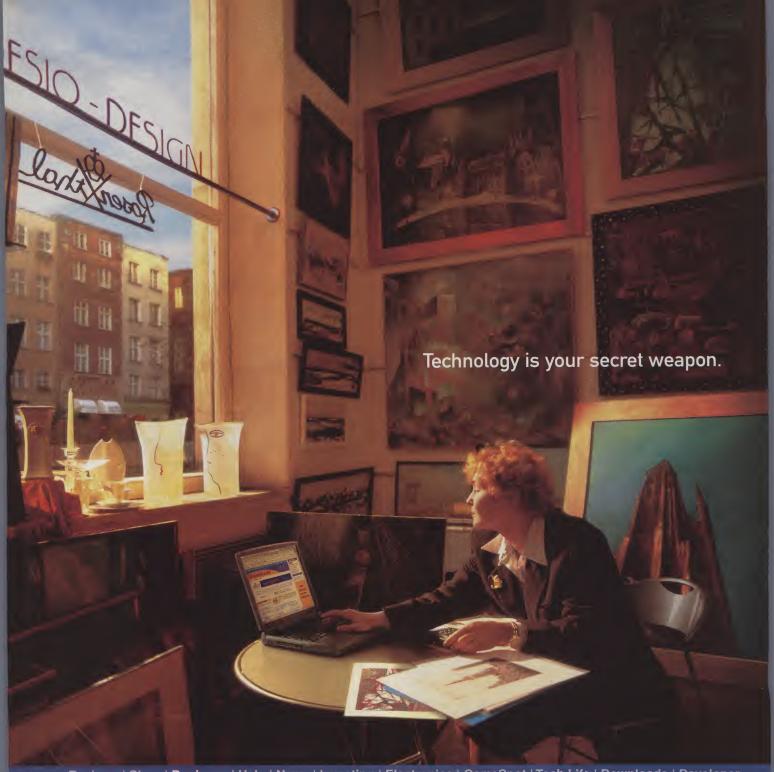
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Suite Conquers Wireless Content

reless technology may be the rage, but for IT departments that have to deliver constantly

changing content over varying bandwidths to diverse devices, it's a nightmare.

Despite the challenge, AlterEgo **Networks** (www.aego.net) is convinced companies are looking for ways to offer wireless content

to mobile workers. To help them in their efforts, AlterEgo has introduced Adaptive Performance Suite. The suite's Content Adaptation Server addresses

the problem of multiple formats. Before companies can wirelessly transfer custom applications, the apps have to



be recoded to be compatible with different devices, readable on screens of different shapes and sizes, and downloaded at a variety of bandwidths. The product turns a

variety of programming formats into XML, and can convert various flavors of one format, such as HTML variants, into the same version. It also detects the user's bandwidth and delivers content optimized for it.

The hardware portion of the suite, Mobile Web Server, detects the type of device being used (it supports 100 cell-phone makes, plus Palm OS, RIM BlackBerry, Handspring, and Pocket PC devices) and serves up content customized for that device.

The Adaptive Portal Server add-on delivers user-customized content, such as that available at a portal. Large companies that support more devices and more content can network multiple Content Adaptation and Mobile Web Servers via the Adaptive Hub, which can also cache bandwidth-intensive content.

AlterEgo requires a two-CPU minimum. Prices per CPU are \$20,000 for Content Adaptation Server, \$25,000 for Mobile Web Server, \$10,000 for Adaptive Portal, \$15,000 for Adaptive Hub, and \$50,000 for the full suite.

—Donna Tapellini

Small Shops Stress Service

om-and-pop shops hoping to survive on the Internet are looking for ways to improve customer service, according to a study by marketresearch firm Cahners In-Stat

Group. A full 82 percent of smalloffice/home-office businesses and 61 percent of small businesses said the Internet has increased their need for improved customer service.

"We're not talking GE here," says Kirsten Cloninger, an In-Stat analyst. It may not pay for a company with fewer than five employees to add live chat, but the company may want to add shopping-cart technology, Web callback, and e-mail-response management.

Site-hosting companies that offer these services include

Bigstep.com (www.bigstep.com), FreeMerchant.com (www. freemerchant.com), and OhGolly. com (www.ohgolly.com).

The study also found smallbusiness customers' most fre-



quent method of contact is e-mail, even more often than a toll-free number. "Small businesses may not be picking up the phone as readily because they don't have the resources to man a phone full-time," Cloninger says.

-Melissa DeMeo

Go With the Stream

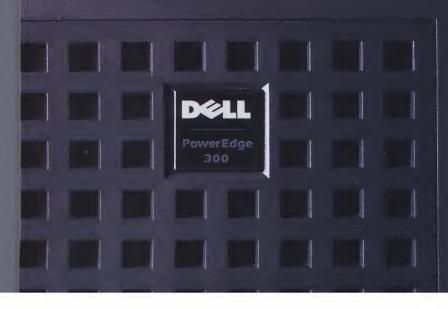
treaming ads make a far bigger impression than banner ads, according to a recent study by online market-research firm Millward Brown Interactive (www.mbinteractive.com). Banner ads produce an average increase in ad awareness of only 5 percent, but streaming ads deliver a score of 24 percent. Translation: After viewing

a banner ad, Web surfers are 5 percent more likely to recall seeing an ad for that brand, while those viewing a streaming ad are 24 percent more likely to recall it.





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Pain-Free Project Manage BY DONNA TAPELLINI

Whether you need to coordinate the tasks of two employees or 200, one of these easy-to-use online project managers can help you get the job done.

ROJECT MANAGERS KNOW SOFTWARE MADE ESPECIALLY FOR THEM often has a steep learning curve—not to mention a hefty price. Simpler tools such as Microsoft Excel and Word are designed for use by only one person. To be effective, a project-management tool has to be easy to use, accessible from anywhere, programmable, and customizable—all attributes particularly well-suited for Web delivery. We took a look at two online project-management offerings, from Intuit and Information Management Systems, that provide a flexible way for businesses and workgroups to manage data across the Internet. What's more, they're free.

INTUIT QUICKBASE

Intuit's QuickBase (www.quickbase.com) is actually a Web-based database with a projectmanagement module. The project manager comes in two flavors—basic and advanced. The first lets you track tasks by factors such as target start date, target finish date, resource (the person assigned to a task), and duration. The advanced version lets you add layers of subtasks to each top-level item, as well as additional subtasks to those subtasks.

Getting started is simple. Once you complete the registration process, you can view the sample databases. In addition to the basic and advanced versions, QuickBase offers several other databases, including personnel, purchase requests, bibliography, contact manager, and asset tracker.

Start your own project manager by copying the sample project manager into your account. This opens a blank database with all the fields preset, ready for your entries. You can also choose to use QuickBase's wizard. This feature provides a blank template to which you can add your own fields. If your project-management information is already stored in Excel or Word, you can easily import that info into QuickBase.

Illustrating the importance of sharing current information, QuickBase offers features that make it easy for all the participants in your project to be on the same page at the same time. Using e-mail invitations, you can assign workgroup members varying levels of access to your project-

AND ADD RECORD	ject Manager		9	The best	
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Deliverable	Description	Deretina (days)	Dopartment	Resource	Status
Merketing Messager	s Identify key marketing messages and ensure consensus by all decision makers.	14	Product Hanegement	Mark	Completed
# Fotus Group	Test preposed marketing messages with focus group	4	Marketing	Susan	Cancelled
Dreft Frees Release	Obtain client quotes, research industry statistics, discuss positioning with PR firm, incorporate corporate image	19	Herketing	Susan	Started
* Brothure Copy	Develop copy to convey marketing messages in context of corporate philosophy	16	Marketing	Suten	Completed
· Product Feature List	Mnakes 5st of features that most be included by leutch	13	Product Management	Mark	Completed
Evaluate Launch Locations	Evaluate locations for compatibility with marketing messages, availability on terget date, suitability for event	11	Marketing	Susan	Completed
Brochure Design/Layout	Design brockurs that imporporates corporate image, draft brockurs copy and photo ideas	1.5	Art	Merthe	Started
@ Plan Sales/Support	Develop plan for staff training based on new product features to be included in launch	19	Product	Back	Started

QuickBase's basic project manager lets you view your project in a variety of ways.

Project	Value Click	click to	ere click.c	om
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At iTeamWork.com, you get several sorting options and can request status updates by e-mail.

management database, including the ability to view, add, or modify any records or their own records. The program also notifies the users you specify when changes are made to the database, keeping your workgroup in the know about who's doing what.

Another handy feature is the ability to change views in the database. You can view deliverables by department, resource, target start or finish date, or status. The application also makes it easy to add documents.

The free version of QuickBase lets you maintain three databases, with a storage limit of 3MB and a file limit of 2MB. A monthly fee of \$14.95 gives you up to 15 databases with 20MB of storage and 15MB of file attachments. The premium package, priced at \$49.95 a month, offers up to 50 databases, 100MB of storage, and 125MB for file attachments. The paid plans offer a 90-day trial period. For users of your database—even those who add records—access is always free.

ITEAMWORK.COM

Information Management Systems takes a different approach with iTeamWork.com (www.iteamwork.com). Its database is much simpler than QuickBase's. Available fields are limited to task number, description, assignee, and original and current completion dates, but its icon-rich interface is slightly more confusing. Because the entire service is free, its revenues are ad-based, so you'll always see a banner ad above your project-management list.

You won't be able to "cheat" by copying blank databases with preset fields, nor can you assign multiple levels of tasks to a project as easily as you can with QuickBase. You'll also have to start from scratch to establish new projects, and assign standalone tasks one at a time. You can then convert tasks into projects, enabling you to view the tasks in greater detail and involve other team members.

Like QuickBase, iTeamWork.com offers several viewing options. You can view a comprehensive summary of all your projects or view by specific information, such as assigned open tasks, closed or completed tasks, or the tasks assigned to each team member. You can also view tasks by original or current completion dates.

One of iTeamWork.com's greatest strengths is its e-mail notification feature. Upon registering, you can elect to receive e-mail outlining your open tasks on any day or days of the week you specify. The program also lets you request e-mail reminders listing tasks that are about to become due and notification for those that have been completed.

You can find lots of shrink-wrapped project-management tools, including FastTrack Schedule, which is also available for the Palm OS (www.aecsoft.com), and Kidasa's Milestones (www.kidasa.com). But if you're looking for an easy, no-cost, online means of collaborating, give these tools a try. ▼



別別別 KIDUCATION

by Rich Castagna

o ahead. Waste an hour interviewing your cousin's brother-inlaw. You know he's not right for the accounting job, but you'll get your cousin off your back. When you're done, tack up a notice in the employee lounge—even offer a generous finder's fee. Then shell out a few hundred bucks for an ad in the local paper.

At that point, you'll probably have learned two things: The pool of availableand qualified—job candidates is as shallow as the business reports have been saying, and it's time to give online recruiting a try.

Online recruiting sites were among the first Web endeavors to exploit the vastness of the Internet. Now dozens of such sites have a solid track record matching employers with job candidates. Today, companies large and small use the Web to fill job openings. Even large recruiting firms, including Accounting Principals, Act 1 Personnel, AppleOne, and Hall Kinion, tap the Web to locate qualified job seekers for their clients.

A BIG POOL OF POSSIBILITIES

These recruiters aren't gambling with their careers by making employment pitches on the Web. A lot of people use the Internet, and a lot of them are using it to look for work. A recent survey of more than 9,000 people, conducted by online recruiting site Yahoo Careers, revealed that over the next six months, a whopping 81 percent planned to check out online job listings and 49 per-

Web-based recruiting services make it easier for your company to find the right job candidates.

cent planned to post their résumés at job sites. Monster.com (www.monster.com), one of the top job sites, claims about 11 million job seekers have registered with its service, accounting for a cumulative 19 million-plus visits each month.

The numbers on the other end of the employment equation are equally impressive. Yahoo Careers (careers.yahoo.com), says it has listed more than a million jobs on the site, and Monster says that at any given time its catalog of employment opportunities includes more than 400,000 unique posi-

tions. Not to be outdone, FlipDog.com (www.flipdog.com), cites more than 650,000 job listings from 52,000 companies.

Once you get past the silliness of names such as Monster and FlipDog, you'll soon take online recruiting seriously, too. The sites generally offer employers a number of service options, but their simple job-posting services may be a good place to start. Even used in their most basic form, as electronic classified ads, online recruiting sites offer three key advantages over traditional print ads:

Lower Cost. A single, modest-size classified ad in your local paper can cost more than \$1,000, but a single online job posting generally costs no more than a few hundred dollars. CareerBuilder (www.careerbuilder. com), for instance, charges \$175, and Monster charges \$275. At Yahoo Careers you pay only \$50.

Online ads typically allow for more char-

ADVICE FOR APPLICANT SEEKERS

Here are some tips for using online recruiting services effectively.

- Before you list your job opening, try a couple of job searches at the site to see how keywords work. Using them may help you refine your job posting and description to improve the chances that the best candidates will find it.
- When writing your jobopening description, use the generous space provided, and offer a detailed description of the job and its requirements.
- If your company's Web site does a good job of describing the company and its products,

include a link to it in your ad. The link will probably cost extra, but it may help screen for serious candidates.

 Consider extra-cost options to give your ad more visibility, such as highlighting your posting in job lists or adding banner ads.

acters, too, so you can provide a more detailed description of the job to help ensure you net appropriate candidates. Monster, actually, requires that your job description be at least 200 characters long, FlipDog lets you use up to 4,000 characters, and Yahoo Careers sets no length limits.

What's more, online ads enjoy a far longer life. Newspaper ads generally run for only a few days or a week. List a job opening on Monster, and the ad stays posted for 60 days; Yahoo Careers ensures your listing stays online 30 days.

Wider Reach. Millions of job seekers visit online recruiting sites daily. How many people read your local newspaper? Realistically, your online ad has the potential to reach far more qualified candidates than a newspaper ad—not just in your hometown but also across the country and even around the world. You could opt to spend a lot more money and run an ad in a national newspaper, but you still wouldn't get the bang for the buck you get from an online recruiter

Greater Convenience. Posting a job at an online recruitment site is a breeze: Just enter your company and contact information, and type or paste in the job description. You can use a credit card to pay for a single posting, and if you're posting a lot of jobs or plan to list employment opportunities on a regular basis, work-order and invoicing plans are available.

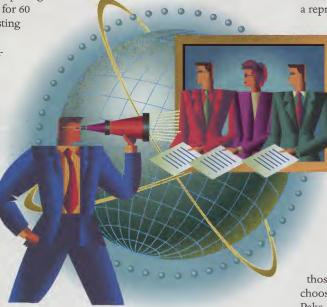
Résumés sent in response to your ad arrive via e-mail, so you won't have sheaves of paper to shuffle through. Digital résumés are easy to file, retain, and retrieve, and you can e-mail them to your colleagues.

And many online recruiters take your candidate search a step further by working together. Some online sites have partnering relationships with other online recruiters to share listings, so your job may also end up listed on sites other than the one on which you originally posted it. Many sites also let job hunters sign up to receive e-mail alerts for jobs that fit their preferences. This can be a great help to employers as well, because interested candidates are more likely to learn of new job postings.

BEYOND THE BASICS

If all you want to do is post a single job, a job site is an effective means of recruitment and a bargain to boot. But these sites offer services that go well beyond what's available using traditional recruiting methods.

You could even use an online recruiting site to fill a position without ever placing an ad for the job. Most sites have huge databases of résumés submitted by job seekers. For an annual subscription fee of about \$2,000 to \$3,000, you can access tools that let you



search these bountiful databases. FlipDog, for instance, charges \$2,995 per year for its Web Candidate Search service. Some companies prefer this method because it lets them actively screen candidates and virtually eliminates receiving résumés from unqualified candidates. Other companies use the databasesearch option for competitive reasons. By searching rather than posting, they can often fill critical or strategic job vacancies without tipping their hands to their competitors.

Try an online recruiting site once, and you're likely to come back for more the next time you need to staff up. For companies with ongoing recruitment needs, a subscription to a package of services can be costeffective and convenient.

All online recruitment sites offer packages, although the specifics of each deal vary. In most cases, package pricing is based on volume and features, so you'll need to telephone a representative to get more detailed informa-

> tion than is available on the site. Generally, the packages offer perpost discounts and batch uploading of job listings. In some cases, online recruiters can upload new job listings automatically from your company's site to theirs.

Tools to manage your recruiting process are usually included in these packages. The Monster Momentum service, for instance, lets you screen and rank applicants, and provides reports to help you monitor your efforts.

If you're not ready to take the plunge with a full membership or subscription, you can get your feet wet with an introductory package such as

those offered by CareerBuilder. You can choose from two three-month CareerBuilder Paks. For \$645 a month you can post 15 jobs each month, and for \$1,150 you can post 30. Your jobs will also be listed on the MSN and USA Today sites.

THE SEARCH IS ON(LINE)

Businesspeople like to talk about things like the "bottom line" and "win-win" situations. We're not giving you the business when we say online recruiting is a winning proposition. You can save money and, at the same time, reach more qualified candidates than ever. V

WHERE THE TECHIES ARE

Here are some sites where tech types look for work.

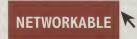
Computer Jobs.com (www.computer jobs.com) This site has more than 54,000 job listings, arranged by location and skills. It claims a 3-to-I ratio of résumés to jobs. Rates vary by type of service.

dice.com (www.dice.com) You have to be a member (starting at \$695 per month) to scan dice.com's lists of candidates. You can link your job postings to your Web site and use keyword searches to explore the candidate database. Your job will be posted on more than a dozen sites.

Directfit (www.directfit.com) This site prequalifies candidates with interviews and other screening processes. You can find full-time or contract employees.

techies.com (www.techies.com) One of the most popular tech-employment sites, it serves 39 geographic regions and offers training services. Prices vary with service plans.

TechRepublic (www.techrepublic.com) This popular tech-help site also has job listings; the placement service is co-branded with HotJobs. You can post a listing for \$195.



OUTSOURCE YOUR IT MANAGER

Management service providers let you transfer the burden of IT support.

BY ROB SCHENK

s your dependence on e-commerce, intranets, and extranets increases, so do the demands on your already overworked and understaffed IT department. Many midsize businesses have attempted to lessen the strain by purchasing network-management software from the likes of Hewlett-Packard, Tivoli, BMC, and Microsoft. These tools may improve manageability, but they're complex and notoriously difficult to implement. And for smaller companies, they're simply out of financial reach.

These factors have given rise to a new breed of company called the management service provider (MSP). By MSP Association (www.mspassociation.org) definition, an MSP delivers "information technology infrastructure management services to multiple customers over a network on a subscription basis." Market-research firm Meta Group places the MSP market at \$75 million to \$100 million. And The Gartner Group predicts the market will expand to \$3.2 billion by 2005.

The MSP value proposition is simple. Instead of purchasing a management tool, training staff to use it, and upgrading or replacing hardware systems as necessary, a company can outsource the entire process to an MSP, and be up and running in a fraction of the time—and at a fraction of the cost. MSPs can typically start managing systems within 15 to 90 days, compared with the six to 18 months required to implement an in-house management system. Contracts are generally for a year or less, placing the onus on MSPs to deliver value quickly.

This rapid delivery schedule offers strategic advantage to those companies for which fast time to market is crucial. And the MSP pay-as-you-go subscription model eliminates the initial infrastructure investments, lessening the strain on internal IT resources and taking potential failure of network-management software implementations out of the equation. In addition, MSPs are responsible for maintaining and upgrading their software offerings as appropriate, so customers don't need to concern themselves with software updating or licensing fees.

ONE SIZE DOESN'T FIT ALL

Services vary significantly from one MSP to another. Some offer a broad range of management services, while others concentrate on vertical areas such as security, storage, content delivery, and application performance and testing. Such wide coverage makes it critical for customers to be diligent and have a clear sense of their needs before

they start the MSP selection process.

Technologies employed differ among MSPs, too. Some license framework software from network-management vendors, while others have developed proprietary tools to pull data from managed devices. Some MSPs deploy onsite servers that deliver information back to a data center for analysis; others deploy agent technology to collect pertinent data.

Most MSPs offer a dashboard-like Web interface through a password-protected information portal. This common interface reduces training time for IT staff. The portal aggregates data from various programs, and presents pertinent graphs and information in a unified interface. Administrators can then monitor such items as server load, network capacity, and application availability, and track IT investments in real time. MSPs can also send alerts via e-mail or pager once particular thresholds are reached, to help administrators nip problems in the bud.

With an MSP monitoring critical systems, IT staff can concentrate on other areas, such as strategic initiatives and emerging technologies. IT management won't need to hire systems-management experts, who are difficult to find, much less retain, in today's competitive labor market. The model provides a middle ground between completely outsourcing management responsibilities and maintaining total internal control.

MEET THE PLAYERS

We spoke with several MSPs—Luminate, Nuclio, PatchLink.com Corp., SilverBack Technologies, SiteLite, TriActive, and WebPartner—to give you an idea of the processes, technologies, and implementation strategies they employ.

Luminate (www.luminate.com) provides self-service monitoring services for Oracle databases, SAP R/3 supply-chain management systems, and the Windows platform. The service monitors operating-system health, hardware metrics, and application status. It uses Mamba, a proprietary tool, to collect data and send it to the Luminate data center for analysis, running reports against a series of "rules of thumb." This expert analysis generates conclusions IT staff can use to fine-tune and optimize system performance.

Nuclio (www. nuclio.com) offers proactive network, Website, and application-monitoring services. The MSP licenses Hewlett-Packard's OpenView network-management software and customizes a Web-based front end to meet a client's specific needs. The Web portal aggregates data from the OpenView engine and 28 other applications, providing clients with snapshots of overall system performance. With the click of a mouse, administrators can drill down for details.

PatchLink.com Corp. (www.patchlink. com) developed WebConsole, a Web-based tool for remotely managing NT servers. By hosting the application, PatchLink provides self-service assistance to IT managers. A software-distribution module that requires an agent pushes software updates and applications to managed desktops and servers. PatchLink Monitor provides a view of external e-commerce services, simulating creditcard transactions and testing database processing. The PatchLink Web site provides a community where users can ask questions to help resolve issues. Its HelpDesk module includes a knowledge base and an incidentreporting mechanism.

SilverBack Technologies (www. silverbacktech.com) provides security-scanning, asset-management, topology-mapping, root-cause-analysis, and monitoring services. Using InfoCare, a Linux-based server appliance installed onsite, SilverBack collects data and sends it back to the data center for analysis. SilverBack has developed middleware that collects information from the different modules and presents administrators with a unified Web interface. Administrators can quickly glance at the screen to ascertain system status.

SiteLite (www.sitelite.com) focuses on

The company has licensed Tivoli's networkmanagement software, and also offers assetmanagement, application-healing, helpdesk, and antivirus services. TriActive can manage down to the desktop level by installing agent technology on managed PCs. A virtual private network (VPN) router provides direct connectivity from the client site to TriActive's data center.

WebPartner (www.webpartner.com) concentrates on monitoring front- and back-end e-commerce sites, database servers, and networking hardware. The service measures traffic patterns and server health, and aggregates data into a dashboard view accessible from a Web browser. It either installs an onsite server to collect data, or uses agent technology.

PROCEED WITH CAUTION

The MSP model is in the process of defining itself and staking out its turf.

> Although it sounds appealing, there's still reason for caution. For many years, IT departments have controlled and managed their own internal systems. Deciding to outsource an entire

IT infrastructure, or portions of it, is a choice that shouldn't be made lightly.

Security is one important area of concern. MSPs are addressing this issue in several ways, including establishing direct VPN connections between customer and data center, and using Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) over HTTP connections. Be sure to investigate the MSP's internal security procedures to ensure data is kept from

Some IT staff may be reluctant to use MSP services because they may view them as a job-security threat. This is a valid concern if plans are to fully outsource management tasks, using companies such as CenterBeam, Everdream Corp., and Loudcloud. For this reason, many MSPs are positioning themselves as enablers complementing, rather than replacing, IT staff

The Internet is the lifeline between MSP vendor and client. Because Internet connectivity can be lost on occasion, the Net isn't the most reliable communication medium. If you lose your Internet connection, your business may not be adequately monitored



managing production client/server systems on a variety of platforms. Resident experts monitor Linux, Oracle databases, Windows, and Web-application servers such as IIS, WebLogic, and ColdFusion. SiteLite provides proactive systems management, applying patches and fixes as needed. It goes beyond basic monitoring by taking on problem resolution from beginning to end. The company will work with clients to support custom applications, if needed.

TriActive (www.triactive.com) focuses on enterprises looking for a self-service MSP.

and protected, a potential concern for companies outsourcing the majority of their infrastructure. Some MSPs, including SilverBack, address this by placing a server onsite. The server collects information for up to seven days during an extended outage.

The MSP market is new and relatively unproven. Some MSPs will go through mergers and acquisitions, and others will fall by the wayside. Companies that offer a wide breadth of services may acquire niche companies to help fill out their portfolios. Or, co-location hosting companies such as Exodus, which is actively partnering with MSPs, may decide to go the acquisition route. Framework software makers, such as BMC and Tivoli, may even enter the MSP market to license their software to MSPs.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

With such a diversity of MSP services, you need to be a smart shopper. Here are some tips to help ensure the MSP selection process is efficient.

First, define the issues you want to solve and itemize your business procedures. With so many MSPs out there, it's important to prioritize your needs to eliminate some vendors from consideration right off the bat.

Next, determine exactly how much of your infrastructure you wish to outsource, keeping in mind the risks associated with this decision. Think about whether you want to outsource the management of the company Web site, specific processes such as security or storage, or your entire IT infrastructure. The risk is greater if you're using the MSP for mission-critical access to applications as opposed to just monitoring tasks.

Another critical issue to consider is the

level of problem resolution you need. Some MSPs alert you to potential and critical issues but

leave problem resolution to your IT staff. If your staff needs expert assistance to help solve the issue, some MSPs will undertake problem resolution from start to finish. Others will refer you to channel partners specializing in those areas.

Taking the time to thoroughly investigate potential MSPs will help prevent service disruption down the road. If possible, arrange a visit to the MSP's facility to examine its procedures and data-center infrastructure. Your MSP's solution should be scalable to grow with your business. It should provide consistent levels of service regardless of how quickly your business grows. Ensure you're satisfied with the MSP's security processes, redundancy levels, and backup procedures.

Carefully review the MSP's technical solutions, and think about how they'll integrate with your current infrastructure. For example, some MSPs require the use of agent technology to generate performance data and increase manageability. But using agents requires a deployment process that may make it more difficult to drop the service. Also, determine if you're comfortable with remote monitoring, or if you'd rather an MSP place servers internally to collect data.

Ask prospective MSPs for a list of references, and call them to find out their experiences. It may be worthwhile to ask for an entire customer list and randomly call companies for feedback. If the customers are having great experiences, the MSP has nothing to lose by divulging this information. Also find out how long the MSP has been in

NETWORKABLE

business. Depth of experience is an important consideration, with so many new

vendors entering the market.

MSP executives have varied backgrounds, ranging from system integration and consulting to network management and software development. Try to ascertain how the vendor is dealing with the tight labor market for technicians.

Once you've decided on an MSP, carefully define a service-level agreement (SLA). An SLA is the contract that specifies the level of service an MSP will provide, and how your company will be reimbursed if service interruptions occur. Consider adding contract language to address what happens in the case of an MSP merger, acquisition, or insolvency. Another key factor to include is an out clause outlining the procedure for dissolving the relationship with the MSP.

The SLA should clearly define and divide responsibilities between your IT staff and the MSP. It's critical to outline the routing of trouble tickets, and determine who gets alerted when specific events occur. Businesses should be proactive in informing the MSP of hardware and software changes; this open communication between parties makes for a better working relationship.

The MSP model is relieving specific pressure points for many businesses. The most successful MSPs forge strong partnerships and stress a proactive, preventive methodology. Although the model is still maturing, be aware of the possibilities these services provide. By thinking about how your business processes will integrate with MSPs, you can realize productivity gains, expand strategic initiatives, and more effectively manage internal systems. V

Management Service Providers

Company	Luminate	Nuclio	PatchLink.com Corp.	SilverBack Technologies	SiteLite	TriActive	WebPartner
Product(s)	Mamba, Luminate.net for SAP R/3, Windows, or Oracle	Fusion	PatchLink Update, PatchLink Monitor, PatchLink HelpDesk	InfoCare	BriteLite Management System, WatchLite	TriActive Systems Manager	SecretShopper Advantage, Secure@Manager
Technologies Used/ Services Offered	Performance manage- ment; database management; Web server and Exchange monitoring	Web-based monitor- ing services; e-mail reports; alerting (Java-based)	Application, database, and directory services; server/ hardware monitoring; help desk; alerting; software distribution and deployment	Security scanning; asset discovery; performance/ network-connectivity monitoring; alerting and escalation; topology mapping	Transaction and network monitoring; operating systems; complete problem resolution; application/ database servers; proactive systems management	Help desk; asset management; remote management; hard- ware-performance, virus, and network monitoring	Web-based monitoring services; e-mail reports; alerting (Java- based)
Sample Pricing	\$50 to \$500 a month per managed server; no startup fee	\$200 to \$2,000 a month per managed server; \$10,000 startup fee	PatchLink Update: \$2.95 a month per desktop, \$49.95 a month per server. Monitor: \$9.95 a month per URL. HelpDesk; \$12.95 a month per admin. \$199 startup fee	\$2,000 to \$4,000 a month; \$2,000 startup fee	\$1,000 to \$1,500 a month per server; up to \$5,000 startup fee	\$5 to \$8 a month per desktop, \$50 a month per server or network device; up to \$10,000 startup fee	\$3,000 to \$10,000 a month; no startup fee
Web Site	www.luminate.com	www.nuclio.com	www.patchlink.com	www.silverbacktech.com	www.sitelite.com	www.triactive.com	www.webpartner.com
Contact Info	650-298-7000 Redwood City, CA	877-665-0597 Oakbrook Terrace, IL	480-970-1025 Scottsdale, AZ	978-670-9944 Billerica, MA	949-753-7500 Rancho Santa Margarita, CA	877-874-2284 Austin, TX	408-213-5000 Cupertino, CA

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PRIL IS ALICE AND BILL'S FAVORITE MONTH, BECAUSE THEY ALWAYS enjoy taking a moment to savor all the foolish products and technical blunders of the past year. The computer industry has long been a place for embarrassing mistakes (OS/2 and Microsoft Bob spring to mind), as well as products foolishly ahead of their time (early PDAs and tablets). Nothing says April more than a stroll through those less-than-perfect moments of the past 12 months. Ready?

ALICE AND BILL'S FOOLISH LIST

Web-enabled cell phones: Just who came up with this idea? Weren't they around when portable computers featured four-line-by-64-character LCD screens that looked like armored gun visors? C'mon already. Maybe we can connect those little phone screens to virtual glasses and get a full view. Just don't try walking, driving, or typing at the same time.

Pentium 4: It's obvious Intel had to break with reality to try to shake AMD's clutch on its coattails, but was Pentium 4 the answer? If so, we need to go back and seriously review the question. To be fair, the Pentium 4 is this big chip available at 1.4GHz and 1.5GHz, much like the original Pentium was a big chip available at 60MHz and 66MHz. (And the slower version of the chip was pulled from the faster CPU's reject pile.) It's time, if it's not already happening by the time you read this, to produce the smaller, faster Pentium 4 and adapt its core to the less expensive Celeron line.

We told you so: What we have now from Intel is a two-tiered CPU system with the expensive processors priced up high and the cheaper ones priced down low. Once upon a time, we were guaranteed that high-end CPUs would migrate down in price. No more. We have to settle now for chips factory-built to be slower and cheap. Why? You did it to yourself by embracing the Celeron with open arms and closed eyes.

AOL and Time Warner merger: The rea-

son the merger is April-worthy is that someone, somewhere, fell not only asleep but into a deep coma when this merger was proposed. The inmates are soon to run the asy-



lum, and we are doomed, doomed, doomed.

The megamerger Alice and Bill would like to see: Cisco and Sun, the backbone of the Internet and the dot in dot-com. They really should merge. They probably won't. That's why they deserve mention here and now. As the old New York State Lottery commercial put it, "Hey, you never know."

SCSI pricing: Along with the Riddle of the Sphinx and the mystery of Mona Lisa's

ALICE & BILL

smile, the price differential between ATAPI/ IDE and SCSI hard drives will certainly go down as one of history's most puzzling events. They don't make SCSI discs from gold and, as far as anyone can determine, the electronic parts that go into SCSI interfaces and controllers are the same as those you'd find on their ATAPI/IDE counterparts. So why the artificial price gap between otherwise equivalent drives? We're not foolish enough to put up with that, are we?

Netscape 6.0: When did AOL become a Microsoft supporter? That's the only reason that comes to mind for the existence of Netscape 6.0. It's terrible—feature-poor, waaay too buggy, and more than vaguely reminiscent of AOL 6.0. (Coincidence? We think not.) It's toppling under the weight of its own huge form perched atop a lack of foundational substance.

PlayStation2 shortage: Nothing creates rabid demand like a good shortage, but Sony just plain threw sales out the window in a marketing blunder Alice and Bill haven't seen since somebody forgot to make Star Wars action figures in time for

Christmas back in the '70s. Second runner-up goes to Sega for foolishly pricing the Dreamcast at \$150 instead of the \$99 Sony was charging for its sleek reissue of the original PlayStation. Sony cleaned up on the old PlayStation, and Sega is in desperate merger talks with Nintendo.

Biggest blunder you won't hear about: The first wave of PlayStation2 games that were not that much better than the Dreamcast games of over a year ago. Sega, you should have been a contender!

The Internet: Hey, it's the Internet. Do you really need to be told why?

NASDAQ: Nah. Too much like the Internet. (See above.) And your 401(K) probably aches too much to listen, anyway.

Dot-coms: Don't even go there. Bluetooth: Let's see. It was announced as a standard about a year and a half ago, and there were some vague product announcements at various trade shows, but it's 2001 and no Bluetooth. Surprised? Guess people don't need to wander around their offices with a laptop and check e-mail from the can.

3D-graphics cards: These things have become so expensive, it's almost reached the point of obscenity. You can't play

ALICE & BILL

games as fast as these cards can render them, yet their frame rates (so high they're nearly divorced from reality) are rocketing the popularity of these cards to hitherto unforeseen foolish heights. It's been almost nine years now. When is everyone going to wake up?

Windows Me: Could anyone get a driver to work after upgrading? Alice and Bill's word to the wise: Just say no.

Computer pricing: Used to be you could purchase a pretty decent computer in the \$1,300-to-\$1,500 range. Then some college boy thought it would be a great thing to sell computers for \$999 (or less) so everyone could own one. Now, suddenly, the sweet spot for PCs is at \$1,800 to \$2,000. Do you think we're idiots?

Broadband: Yes, it's coming. No, it no longer means ridiculous streaming Internet soap operas and amateur interactive animated shorts. Now it's just a fast, always-on connection in the home that almost no one can get. So much for progress.

Bill's personal broadband peeve-Optimum Online: First they wire up Long Island before they figure out that maybe there are more people in the state of New Jersey who could use cable-modem service. When they finally got around to New Jersey, the documentation was for a different modem; the version of Netscape included on the installation disc didn't know how to install itself to the system; and the technical-support folk, though willing to give things a most valiant try at some of the oddest hours Bill could call, didn't have a clue about Netscape. "Optimum Online, Optimum Online, bladdy-blah, bladdy-blah, blah, blah, blah." That's literally what the commercial said. Bill should have listened more carefully.

ALICE AND BILL'S NOT-SO-FOOLISH LIST

The following items were bright but somehow still foolish: first-revision products, Web sites that cut edges but don't have what it takes to stay around for long, and even whole trends such as home networking that never seem ready for prime time no matter how much we need them. To the few this year that made the cut, Alice and Bill award the near-Mondo Cool equivalent: the Not-So-Foolish List.

The Super Happy Fun Slander Corner on F**kedCompany.com: Slander is mean and terrible, but when the dot-com sector started imploding, a lot of people needed a safe way to vent their frustrations over bad

business models and sliding stock valuations. The notoriously well-visited dot-com dead-pool site F**kedCompany.com launched a new bulletin-board feature called the "Super Happy Fun Slander Corner." Here visitors can anonymously post their bitter hearts out. Or is that vent their spleens? Alice and Bill are just glad they don't have to read anything about themselves in that shark pool, but they do salute exploiting the freedom of the Net to let a few things off your chest.

3Com's Audrey: It's just a little Internet appliance that does your e-mail, sends you

At F**kedCompany.com's "Super Happy Fun Slander Corner" visitors can anonymously post their bitter hearts out.

off to portal destinations, and lets you schedule and plan in conjunction with your Palm OS. It's also not ready for prime time just yet, but Alice and Bill are oddly intrigued.

When the kids are blasting alien mutants on your \$3,000 computer and all you want to do is get online and check for that urgent message you've been expecting, Audrey is the thing to have to keep from chucking the kids out the upstairs window. And kids: If you're tired of mom and dad finding your e-mail when they log on to get their own, well, Audrey is what you need. (Don't worry, mom and dad. Unless the kids figure out they need to delete their e-mail, it will all be there for you to peruse. Audrey has no real storage, and the messages aren't really removed from the e-mail server unless your ISP does that automatically.)

It's not perfect. You're going to hate the "customized" channels because you can change them only for other "authorized" Web sites not of your choosing. You'll probably love Scribble because it's exactly what its name implies—a digital way to capture handwritten messages as just plain, old-fashioned scribbles. It's about time somebody figured out how to do it.

Because it will be a love/hate relationship, Alice and Bill say try it at the store, but wait for the next version. At \$499 direct, Audrey isn't that much cheaper than a full-fledged PC, and it's not cheap enough to use to keep the coffee table level if you don't like it.

Intel's AnyPoint Wireless Home Network: Home networking is also not ready for

prime time, but if you absolutely have to have it (something Alice and Bill understand), Intel has an inexpensive wireless solution called the AnyPoint Wireless Home Network (www.anypoint.com) that's worth a look. No wiring necessary: Just hook the transceiver to your PC's USB connection or pop a wireless card into your laptop's PC Card slot, and you're wirelessly connecting to the Net from your easy chair. Transfer speed is 1.6Mbps—a far cry from

doing the 10Mbps home router. But if ease is the name of this game, and sharing one Internet connection in the house is where you need to be, Intel has cooked up a nice suite of net-

working products.

One word of caution: NT users are out of luck, as are Mac users (this is an Intel product, after all). But for the rest of us wishing we could play music files from downstairs or share the color printer, this is one inexpensive (typically about \$80 a PC, but expect some play in the price) networking solution that's definitely not foolish. (You may also want to check out SOHOware, at www.sohoware.com. Its stuff is a little pricier, especially if you add the CableFree NetBlaster. But it's somewhat more flexible and maybe a wee bit faster. It's also compatible with 95, 98, NT, 2000, and Me. —Unwired Bill.)

FEELING FOOLISH?

Alice and Bill only scratched the surface of the foolhardy this year. There's not enough space to cover everything here, and Alice and Bill love to be reminded of bloopers they've overlooked, so they need you to pitch in with a few favorites of your own. Send them an e-mail with "foolish" in the subject line and show them the products and technologies you found foolishly unforgettable. The most foolish products will get an honorable mention in an upcoming "Hard Edge." Fame, glory, and more—all for taking a few minutes out of your day for Alice and Bill. What could be better?

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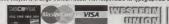
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TUNE-UP

Upgrading Your System for DVD-QUALITY VIDEO EDITING

BY SHELDON LEEMON

atch the latest iMac commercials touting built-in video-editing features, and it's natural to wonder if your own system is up to the same job. For the typical PC owner, the answer is probably "not yet." Few PCs come with the necessary hardware to capture analog video from a VHS-C or 8mm camcorder, or from a digital camcorder for that matter. (See the sidebar "Direct to Digital.") The good news is that you can add video-capture and -editing capabilities to your system easily and without spending a lot of money. In a few short steps, you too can start realizing your Sundance dreams, or at least begin Sunday-evening family showings.

The most economical way to get into video editing on your system is to buy a videocapture board that also provides video-editing software. Most do. When you choose a capture card for editing videos that you'll export back to videotape, it's important to get one that preserves the quality of your original video. You'll want a device that captures video at full size and full speed (in technical terms, at a resolution of 720x480 pixels at 30 frames per second). and compresses the video using a method that doesn't degrade the picture (such as MPEG-2).

If you find the technical terms hard to remember, just look for boards that advertise "DVD-quality" capture, since DVD movies also use MPEG-2 compression. You'll also want to make sure that the card you choose can output to your VCR; some capture cards lack video- and audio-out connectors, which you'd need to save the video to a VCR or other external device.

For this Tune-Up, we selected the Dazzle Digital Video Creator II capture card, which meets the above requirements and sells online for about \$250. The Dazzle board coexists with your current display adapter. If you're interested in a device that does more than just capture and compress video, consider a combination board such as the ATI All-in-Wonder Radeon (see this issue's Reviews section) or the Matrox Marvel G450 eTV. These offerings, which replace your current graphics card, also provide 3D acceleration for games and add a TV tuner.

Before you start this upgrade, you'll want to make sure your system is up to the rigors of video editing. Editing high-quality video requires at least a 400MHz processor, 128MB of RAM, and, depending on the size of your project, several free gigabytes of hard drive space.

Enable DMA hard drive transfers.

Verify that your hard drive is set to use Direct Memory Access (DMA). DMA allows your drive to read information from memory without using the CPU, and it can easily make the difference between video that is choppy and video that is Hollywood-smooth. You can determine whether or not DMA is enabled for your drive by selecting Start/Settings/Control Panel/System and choosing the Device Manager tab. Expand the Disk Drives listing, select the appropriate hard drive (probably the first), and click on the Settings tab.



Enabling DMA will increase performance, possibly giving you smoother video.

If the box next to DMA contains a check mark, DMA is enabled. If it's not checked, click on the box to enable DMA.

TIP: If turning on your hard drive DMA prevents Windows from starting properly, start Windows in Safe Mode and turn DMA off.

Install the PCI capture card.

After turning off your computer and disconnecting the power cable, open the case, following the manufacturer's instructions. Choose an open PCI slot (they're usually the white slots), remove the slot cover, and plug in the card. Secure the card's end bracket with the screw you removed from the slot cover, and replace the cover.

TIP: Although you can install the card in any empty PCI slot, video-capture devices can be somewhat



Install the capture card in an open PCI slot.

fussy. They don't like sharing an interrupt with other devices, so it's not a good idea to plug the card into the slot next to the AGP card, because that slot often shares an IRQ with the AGP video card. The next slot over is usually a better choice.

Install the device driver and video-editing software.

Start your computer, and the Windows Add New Hardware wizard will pop up after the system detects the capture card. With the Dazzle card we used, the manufacturer advises installing the device driver and editing software in one step: Click Cancel to terminate the wizard, and when the Windows startup process completes, insert the MovieStar CD into the drive. The software installer should start automatically, allowing you to load the Dazzle's driver and software. Have your Windows CD handy, in case the setup routine needs it. After completing the software-installation process, shut down the system.

TIP: If the Add New Hardware wizard doesn't appear when you

reboot, you may not have installed the board correctly. Shut down, and try removing it and plugging it in again.

Attach the external connector box.

Many current capture boards, including the Dazzle Digital Video Creator II, come with an external connector (or "breakout") box to provide the assortment of necessary video and audio connectors. Plug the cable



Plug the connector box into the capture card.

DIRECT TO DIGITAL

f you are fortunate enough to own one of the new digital camcorders with an IEEE 1394 (also known as FireWire or i.Link) interface, your path to editing digital video is even easier. You don't need to digitize your video, because the camcorder stores it in digital format for you, saving time, money, and video quality.

To bring the video into your PC for editing, all you need is an IEEE 1394 interface board. Install the PCI interface card and editing software, connect a single cable from your PC to the camcorder, and you're ready to edit.

To ensure hardware and software compatibility, your best bet is to buy an interface card that includes editing software. You can find a number of solutions in the \$100-to-\$200 price range, including the Dazzle DV-Editor, Digital Origin's IntroDV, and the Canopus EZDV. One of the best is the Pinnacle Studio DV, which sells for about \$90. Its editing software is easy to use, and it saves hard drive space by letting you edit low-resolution preview video and then assemble the finished tape using the high-resolution footage.

attached to the external connector box into the connector on the rear bracket of the PCI capture card.

TIP: Some capture boards use an "octopus" cable arrangement: One or two cables that plug into the capture board's slot bracket branch off to provide the various required input and output cables.

Connect the video input.

Video cables and connectors typically use yellow color-coding. Plug one end of the yellow-coded cable into the video-in jack on the connector box, and plug the other end into the video-out jack of the video source (typically, your camcorder). If your camcorder has an S-Video output—as is typical of Hi-8 and S-VHS decks—use the black S-Video cable to connect it to the S-Video-in jack on the connector box, instead of using the yellow-coded video cable. Using the S-Video connectors will provide better-quality video input for your captures.

Some camcorders use a single connector for video input and output, with a slide switch determining its function. If your cam-

corder has such a switch, make sure it's set to "output" before you try capturing video.





Plug the video output of the camcorder into the video-in port on the connector box. Plug the camcorder's audio output into the audio-in ports on the connector box.

Connect the audio inputs.

Plug both connectors on one end of the audio cable into the two audio-in jacks on the connector box, using the color-coding on the plugs (white to white, red to red). Plug the other ends into the audio-out jacks of your camcorder or playback deck.

Tip: If you are working with a mono camcorder or VCR—one that uses only one audio channel and one audio connector—use the connectors for only one audio channel (typically the left channel, using the white-coded plug). Alternatively, you can connect both connectors into an RCA Y-adapter, available at RadioShack.

Connect the video output to your VCR.

Plug one end of the video cable into the video-out jack on the connector box, and the other end into the video-in jack on the VCR you'll use for recording (using the S-Video cable if your VCR has S-Video inputs, or the yellow-coded cable if it doesn't). If you want to watch your finished video while (or before) it's taping, you should also connect a video monitor or television to your VCR.



Connect the video-out port on the connector box to the video-in jack on the VCR. Connect the audio-out ports on the connector box to both your sound card and your recording VCR.

Connect the audio outputs.

With some capture boards, audio output goes only into your system's sound card, and you output audio to

the VCR by connecting a cable from the line-out jack of the sound card to the audio-in jacks on the VCR. With the Dazzle card, you use a special, included cable with two sets of RCA plugs and one headphone miniplug. Connect the plugs labeled "audio out" to the audioout port on the connector box. The headphone miniplug connects to the line-in jack on your sound card. The plugs marked "audio in" connect to the audio-in jacks on the VCR you'll use for recording. TIP: If the VCR you're using to record has mono sound, you'll

only use one audio cable (again, the left, or white-tipped, plug). If your camcorder has stereo outputs but your VCR has a mono input, you're better off using a Y-cable to combine the two outputs into one input.

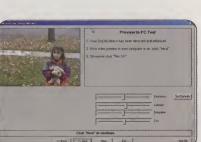
Test your video input.

Power up the system and run the Dazzle Setup wizard, which will allow you to test your video-capture and -editing system. When you start playing a tape in your camcorder, you should see the video from the camcorder in the setup window.

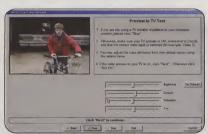
TIP: If the video overlay isn't displaying properly, try dragging the setup screen a little to force a refresh.

Test your video output.

While still playing video from your camcorder, use the Next button to advance to the next screen. The video from your camcorder will be



The first screen of Dazzle's Setup wizard allows you to test your video input.



The next screen of the Setup wizard lets you test video output to your VCR.

routed to your VCR. If you have a monitor connected to your VCR, it should be displaying the video. To tape a few minutes of the video as a test, insert a blank tape in your VCR and begin recording.

TIP: Some VCRs automatically route the output of the video-in jack to the monitor, but others require you to move the channel selector to AV or Video 1 (usually channel 0) before you can see the incoming video. You may also need to set your monitor or televi**Final Cut 5 ESSENTIAL ZDNET DOWNLOADS Adobe Premiere** Perform professional video editing. Edit video on your computer. EditStudio Edit captured video clips. Video Investigator 2000 Process and analyze video. VideoStudio Create and edit home videos. DOWNLOAD THEM NOW FROM computershopper.zdnet.com/downloads

TUNE-UP

sion to the appropriate video input (Video 1 or Video 2, for instance) before you can see the video passing through the VCR.



The final Setup wizard screen lets you adjust the sound coming in from your

Use the Setup wizard to test your audio input.

While continuing to play video from your camcorder, use the Next button to advance to the next screen. You should be able to hear the audio from your camcorder through the speakers attached to your computer's sound card. You can

adjust the volume of the audio using the two volume controls. The Input Gain slider controls the level of your camcorder's audio coming into the system. V

LINKS FOR VIDEO AUTEURS

nce you invest in your video setup, you may want to learn more about the art of creating compelling video. Good places to start include the Web sites of print magazines dedicated to the video hobbyist, such Videomaker (www. videomaker.com). The magazine's site offers articles from the most recent six issues even to nonsubscribers (readers who subscribe or buy the magazine on the newsstand get a password for access to several years of back issues), as well as solid background information on video-production techniques. For a perspective from across the pond, check out Britain's Computer Video magazine (www.computervideo.net). The products mentioned may not all be available in the States, but you'll find a nice beginner's guide to computer video.

About.com's Desktop Video section (desktopvideo.about. com) has a good collection of links, along with some original articles. Finally, check out Videoguys.com (www.videoguys.com). Though it's a dealer site, it provides a wealth of product information and troubleshooting tips.

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ALFRED POOR'S

COMPLETE CONTROL

Dear Alfred:

I use Microsoft Internet Explorer 5, and while I like its AutoComplete feature, I'd like to be able to control what information it stores. Is there any way to selectively delete entries?

Alan Cummings

AutoComplete is certainly convenient, but the data is stored in encrypted form on your hard drive, so there's no simple way to directly edit the database. However, you can easily clear all the entries of different categories. In Internet Explorer 5, choose Tools/Internet Options, then press the Content tab. In the Personal Information box, select the Auto-Complete button. You can then Clear Forms or Clear Passwords by hitting the appropriate

Alternately, you can delete a single item. Simply place the cursor in a text box you want to fill in, then press the Down Arrow to open the list of AutoComplete items for that box. Find an entry you want to delete, then just press the Delete key.

BETTER BURNING

Dear Alfred:

Every time I try to record music from an audio CD to a CD-R, it starts to record but stops with errors about halfway through the process. How can I fix this?

Tommy Sanchez

The most frequent cause for CD-R recording errors is a buffer underrun, which means that the CD-R writer runs out of data while recording to the disc. Newer CD-R drives have larger buffers that can help prevent this problem. If you have an older drive, try creating an image of the CD on your hard drive first, then copy to CD-R from that. The hard drive is more likely to be able to keep the drive supplied with data, whereas a CD-ROM drive might not, so you're more likely to get a successful burn.

SHOCK TO THE SYSTEM

Dear Alfred:

A thunderstorm recently struck our area, and before it hit I turned off all power to my computer. After the storm, however, the

computer would not boot

up. Some power lights come on, but nothing appears on the screen, and I can't hear the disks being accessed. What has happened to my computer?

Mike Ward

It's possible for a lightning strike to induce current in a power line that can affect components even if they are switched off. With most computers, the power supply is the part that takes the hit.

Turn on the system, and check to see if the power-supply fan is turning. If not, there's a good chance that the power supply got smoked. Fortunately, a power supply is relatively inexpensive to replace. If the power supply checks out okay, then one or more of your expansion cards or the motherboard may have been fried.

Next time a big thunderstorm rolls into

ALFRED POOR

the area, you could unplug all your electronics, although it's more sensible to hook up everything to a power strip with surge protection. A surge protector will most likely absorb any spikes—though it may die in the process—and is more convenient than unplugging and replugging everything.

CARTRIDGE CONUNDRUM

Dear Alfred:

I have to order new printers for our lab and would like to know the advantages and disadvantages, if any, of printers that use ink cartridges with the printheads included and those with separate printheads.

Gene Klein

An advantage to having the printhead in the cartridge is that if it gets clogged, you simply replace it with a new cartridge. On the downside, you'll have to pay for the head. If cartridge costs and ink consumption are comparable, I'd be inclined to go with the head-in-cartridge design, because a new cartridge is often less expensive and more convenient than getting a damaged permanent head repaired. V

tip of the month

THE POWER OF ASSOCIATION

Readers often report problems that arise when one program has changed the association for a given file type and they want to change it back. One tedious way is to search through the list of file associations and edit the entry. Or you can use the following tip from a long-time friend of "Computer Cures."

Dear Alfred:

To change the association for any Microsoft type of file, open Windows Explorer and highlight one of the files of that type. Then hold down the Shift key, and right-click on the file. The menu that pops up will have an Open With option, which allows you to change the program that file is associated with. Check the box to make the change for all files of that type.

Toni Hackler

That's a great tip because it makes a difficult task so easy. Note that you have to follow the instructions precisely; if the filename is not highlighted first, the trick

won't work. And note that the Open With choice may be a few entries down the list in the pop-up menu.

Send us your favorite tip, and you could receive a Tipster's prize pack-

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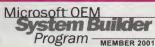












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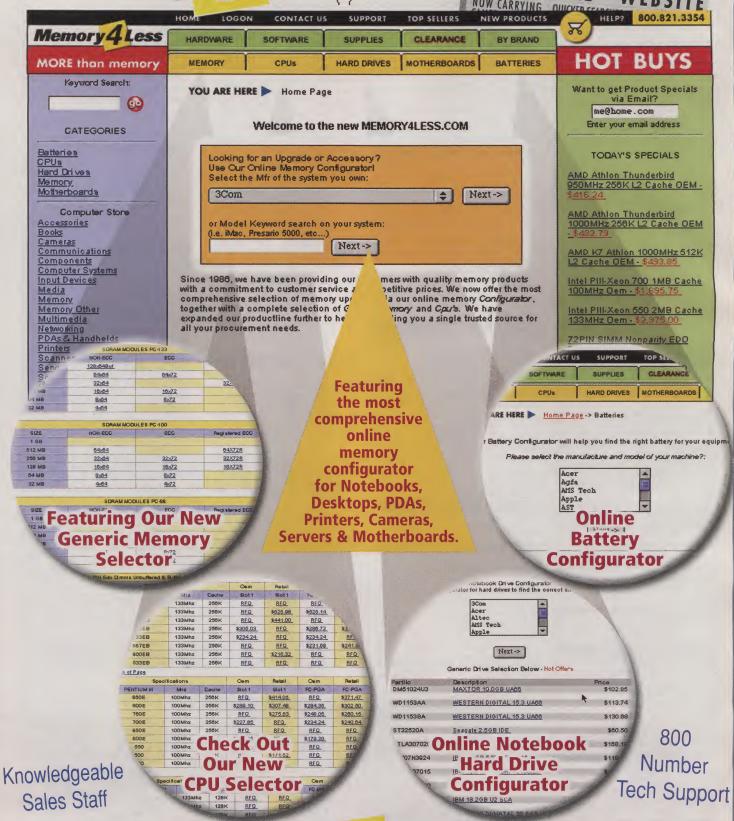


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BUYING ADVISOR

A Clear, Calibrated CRT

Our Advisor finds a quality 19-inch monitor that costs less than \$450 and still satisfies the needs of a Photoshop enthusiast.

OU'D THINK THAT BUYING A monitor would be about as easy as tech shopping gets. After all, the technology isn't new, and scores of displays are vying for a spot on your desk.

But, as we found out, you'd be wrong. Mitchell Hull, an amateur photographer from Decatur, Ill., is searching for an outstanding 19-inch CRT for less than \$450. With the mob of great monitors currently on the market, it initially seemed there would be little real advice to share. But monitor shopping can involve its own vernacular, with simple introductory talk of dot pitch and resolution quickly morphing into complex issues such as color calibration, geometry problems, and misconvergence.

"As anyone who has ever printed an image from their computer knows, getting the print to look like the monitor image is very difficult, if not impossible," Hull says. "Having the monitor set up in an accurate, calibrated state makes this easier."

Hull is a Photoshop jockey who depends on this kind of accuracy, which requires good monitor calibration. To that end, he has invested \$300 in the MC7 hardware colorimeter and OptiCal software from ColorVision. Using this hardware/software bundle, he can adjust some pretty specialized aspects of his monitor's picture, including its

color temperature and gamma measurement.

Now he just needs the monitor, which should support 1,280x1,024 resolution at a 75Hz or higher refresh rate and have a movable onscreen display menu so he can place his colorimeter in the center of the screen. And as with

any CRT monitor, the smaller the dot pitch—the distance between two pixels of the same color—the better.

ViewSonic GS790

The real catch: Warranty and shipping policies are of prime importance to Hull

because a defective unit weighing 50 pounds or more can cost a lot to ship back for repair or replacement. Because of this, he's leaning toward a unit sold by a local distributor.

So with image quality, return policy, and sale price in mind, we set out to find the 19inch monitor that best matched his stringent demands. Though the choices were abundant, three monitors kept appearing at the top of magazine reviews and user-feedback groups: the venerable ViewSonic G790, the Samsung SyncMaster 900NF, and the lesser-

CHALLENGE

USER PROFILE

Mitchell Hull, an amateur photographer who uses Photoshop extensively.

COMPUTING NEEDS

A 19-inch monitor with a sharp picture and thorough onscreen display controls, backed by a generous return policy or available from a local distributor.

known **Cornerstone** p1450. All three feature flat-screen CRTs manufactured by Hitachi, Mitsubishi, or Samsung, and support 1,280x1,024 resolution at 85Hz or better.

Our own computershopper.com (www.computershopper.com) and other shopping bots led us to only a trickle of available

> G790s, a monitor that delivers true color and accurate images but has fairly rudimentary onscreen image controls. A better fit is the updated version, the GS790, which delivers a 0.26mm dot pitch and a refresh rate of 88Hz at 1,280x1,024. It features an identical tube that's wrapped in a space-saving design only 16.2 inches deep. What's more, it offers more sophisticated onscreen controls than

its predecessor.

For these new GS790s, we found plenty of sources, the cheapest being House of Computers (www.hoct.com), which had the units in stock for \$419, including shipping.

BUYING



Better yet, Hull could purchase the GS790 at his local Staples outlet for \$405.49.

The SyncMaster 900NF from Samsung features the finest dot pitch (0.25mm), the highest maximum resolution (a whopping 2,048x1,536 at 69Hz), and extremely fine picture-adjustment controls. Most experienced users and professional reviewers recommended it highly. We found it online at PCNation (www.pcnation.com) for \$421, including shipping.

Unfortunately, we could not find a local retailer, so we checked out Samsung's return policy instead. Like the GS790, the 900NF is backed by a three-year warranty. And while the company will repair or replace a broken model, Hull would be on the hook for the shipping charges, roughly \$40 each way.

Meanwhile, we found Cornerstone's p1450 for \$453, including shipping, at www.monitorsdirect.com. The unit features a 0.26mm dot pitch and receives universal praise for accurate color and excellent focus. Though it's more expensive than the other two units, the p1450 is backed by a generous five-year parts-and-labor warranty.

Local retailers generally do not carry this professional-level monitor, however, and return shipping costs are the buyer's responsibility. But for an additional \$35, Hull could upgrade to the company's ImageCare warranty, which pays for return shipping in many cases. But that would bring his total to \$488.

All things considered, the ViewSonic GS790 delivers the best overall package,

SOLUTION

THE ADVISOR'S CHOICE

The \$421 Samsung SyncMaster 900NF produces a very sharp picture and has the most advanced onscreen controls, but it's unavailable from local distributors. The lesser-known Cornerstone p1450 wins kudos for its sharp picture and generous five-year warranty, but it's a little expensive at \$453. The best choice is the ViewSonic GS790, which delivers an award-winning picture and good onscreen controls-and is available for as little as \$405.49 from many national distributors.

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For real-time pricing, go to priceit.zdnet.com and enter number.

thanks to its solid picture, low price of \$405.49, and local distributor, which gives Hull a less costly recourse if he ends up with a defective unit.

If you want help making a smart buying decision, e-mail the Buying Advisor at buying_advisor@zdnet.com.

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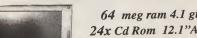
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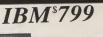
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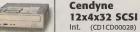
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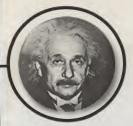
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E55	15"	.28DP	1280 X 1024	
M50	15"	.27DP	1280 X 1024	
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GA655	15"	.27DP	1280 X 1024	
E70	17"	.27DP	1280 X 1024	
E771	17"	.27DP	1280 X 1024	
E773	17"	.25DP	1280 X 1024	
GS773	17"	.27DP	1280 X 1024	
G773	17"	.26DP	1280 X 1024	
PS775	17"	.25DP	1600 X 1280	
E790	19"	.26DP	1600 X 1200	
GA771	17"	.27DP	1280 X 1024	
G90M	19"	.26DP	1600 X 1200	
PF790	19"	.25DP	1600 X 1280	
PS790	19"	.25DP	1600 X 1280	
G810	21"	.25DP	1600 X 1280	
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FIVE	С.	www.relysi		
ELI SI ETE555	ر رو 15"	www.reiysi: .28DP		
TE770		2809		
ETE786T		.26DP		
FTF786H	17"		1600 X 1200\$199	
FTF988	19"	26DP	1600 X 1200 \$269	

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WD100EB 10200 9.5MS/5400 2048K 3.5"/1"H \$88
WD200EB 20000 9.5MS/5400 2048K 3.5"/1"H \$96
WD200AB 20500 8.5MS/5400 2048K 3.5"/1"H \$98
WD200BB 20000 9 MS/7200 2048K 3.5"/1"H \$107
WD307AA 30700 9.5MS/5400 2048K 3.5"/1"H \$109
WD400AB400008.5MS/54002048K 3.5"/1"H\$126
WD300BB 30000 9 MS/7200 2048K 3.5"/1"H \$133
WD450AA450009.5MS/54002048K 3.5"/1"H\$137
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WD600AB600008.5MS/54002048K3.5"/1"H\$179
IBM. www.ibm.com
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IBM307015 15000 8.5MS/7200 2048K 3.5"/1"H \$104
IBM305030300009.5MS/54002048K 3.5"/1"H\$114
IBM307020200008.5MS/72002048K3.5"/1"H\$116
IBM305040 40000 9.5MS/5400 2048K 3.5"/1"H \$121
IBM307030 30000 8.5MS/7200 2048K 3.5"/1"H \$139
IBM307045450008.5MS/72002048K 3.5"/1"H\$149
IBM307060600008.5MS/72002048K 3.5"/1"H\$227
IBM307075750008.5MS/72002048K3.5"/1"H\$312
MEXIOT." www.maxtor.com ALL MAXTOR IDE DRIVES LISTED HAVE A 3YR WARRANTY
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MAX153-7200 .15300 .9.5 MS/72002046K3.5 /1 H\$99
MAX307-5400 .307009.5 MS/54002046K 3.5"/1"H\$109
MAX204-7200 .20400 .9.5 MS/72002048K3.5"/1"H\$115
MAX409-5400 .40900 9 MS/54002048K 3.5"/1"H \$119
MAX307-7200 .30700 .9.5 MS/72002048K3.5"/1"H\$126
MAX409-7200 .40900 .9.5 MS/72002048K3.5"/1"H\$120
MAX614-5400 .61400 9 MS/5400 2048K 3.5"/1"H \$189
MAX819-5400 81900 9 MS/5400 2048K 3 5"/1"H \$257
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PROMISE	
TECHNOLOGY,INC. WWW.promisetechnology.com	
PRULTRA66 ULTRA ATA66 PCI 4 HARD DRIVE	\$24
PRULTRA100 ULTRA ATA100 PCI 4 HARD DRIVE	\$49
PRFASTRAK100 ULTRA ATA100 RAID PCI	\$82
Gadaptec www.adaptec.com	
AD2940AU0EM ULTRA SCSI BUS MSTR 20MB/SEC 0EM	\$151
AD2040HWPROOFMHITPA 2 PCL 80MR/SEC OFM	\$184

AD2940UWPROOEM ULTRA 2 PCI 80MB/SEC 0EM \$184 AD291600EM ULTRA 2 PCI BUS MSTR 160MB/SEC 0EM \$195 AD19160KIT ULTRA 2 PCI BUS MSTR 160MB/SEC RETAIL\$214 AD2940U2W0EM ULTRA 2 PCI BUS MSTR 80MB/SEC 0EM\$219 AD29160KIT ULTRA 2 PCI BUS MSTR 160MB/SEC RETAIL \$283

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WDE18310-0040 183005.2MS/100002048K3.5"/1"H\$227
WDE18310-0050 183005.2MS/100002048K3.5"/1"H\$232
Seagate www.seagate.com
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ST39236LW92005.8MS/72002048K3.5"/1"H\$207
ST39216N92005.8MS/72002048K3.5"/1"H\$217
ST39216W92005.8MS/72002048K3.5"/1"H\$217
ST39236LWV92005.8MS/72004096K3.5"/1"H\$222
ST318416N184005.8MS/72002048K3.5"/1"H\$314
ST318416W184005.8MS/72002048K3.5"/1"H\$314
ST318436LW184005.8MS/72002048K3.5"/1"H\$314
ST318436LWV184005.8MS/72004096K3.5"/1"H\$326
ST318404LW184005.2MS/10,0004096K3.5"/FH\$357
ST318451LW184005.2MS/15,0004096K3.5"/FH\$469
ST336704LW367005.2MS/10,0004096K3.5"/FH\$592
ST336704LWV367005.2MS/10,00016000K3.5"/FH\$604
ST173404LW734005.6MS/10,0004096K3.5"/FH\$1084
ST173404LWV734005.6MS/10,00016000K3.5"/FH\$1114
ST173404LCV734005.6MS/10,00016000K3.5"/FH\$1129

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	G450 16MB, SDR AGP OEM (DUAL)	\$73
	G450 16MB, DDR AGP OEM (DUAL)	\$93
	G450 32MB, DDR AGP OEM (DUAL)	\$125
MATG45032DDRE	BOX G450 32MB, DDR AGP RET(DUAL)	\$134
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ATIX988P	EXPERT 98 PCI OEM VER 8MB	\$56
ATIRF16A	EXPERT RAGE AGP OEM VER 16MB	\$53
ATIX200032A	EXPERT 2000 AGP OEM VER 32MB	\$59
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ATIRF32ATV	RAGE FURY AGP OEM 32MB W/TV	\$92
ATIRFPR32ATV	RAGE FURY PRO AGP OEM 32MB W/TV	\$103
ATIRFMAX64	RAGE FURY MAX AGP OEM 64MB	\$109
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ATIRADEON64A	RADEON AGP OEM 64MB DDR	\$189
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STB3500-16ATV	3DFX VOODOO 3 AGP OEM 16MB TV	\$144
STB5500-64A	3DFX VOODOO 5 AGP OEM 64MB	\$152
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ASV7700P32A	GEFORCE-2 AGP 32MB DDR	\$189
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CLCT4750	SOUND BLSTR PCI 128 0EM	\$29
CLCT4832	SOUND BLSTR LIVE VALUE PCI OEM	\$47
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CUSBLPLATS 1	RSOLIND BLSTR LIVE PLATINUM RET	\$177

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3C3594	56 KBPS DATA/14.4kbps FAX INT PCI V.90 OEM/VOICE	\$34
3C2975	56 KBPS DATA/14.4kbps FAX INT PCI V.90 OEM/NO VOICE	\$38
3C2974	56 KBPS DATA/14.4kbps FAX INT PCI V.90 OEM/VOICE	\$36
3C2977	56 KBPS DATA/14.4kbps FAX INT PCI V.90 OEM/NON WIN	\$57
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CREA		
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CLDI5660	56 KBPS DATA/14.4kbps FAX INT PCI V.90 NON WIN	\$25

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10ZIP250IDE REMOVABLE DRI	IVE 250MB INT ZIP IDE 0EM	\$77				
10ZIP100USB REMOVABLE DRI	IVE 100MB EXT ZIP USB	\$117				
10ZIP250USB REMOVABLE DRI	IVE 250MB EXT ZIP USB	\$164				
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EDITED BY KIERSTEN CONNER-SAX

NEW PRODUCTS WE'D LIKE TO SEE

News reports indicate that a Michael Jordan-edition Palm device may follow in the footsteps of the Claudia Schiffer Palm Vx. Here are the top five Palms we'd like to see:



George W. Bush

No, sorry, that's an Etch A Sketch

Britney Spears

Comes with special 'N Sync cradle

OP, The Oprah Palm Resistance is futile

Regis Philbin

It's already really shiny, and it couldn't be that hard to turn it into a tie

Instead of contacts, maintains list of "potential victims"

OUR FAVORITE AMAZON.COM PURCHASE CIRCLE

Books: Unique to Willage Network ne Princessa : Machiavelli for Women Harriet Rubin ually ships in 24 hours

We thought Machiavelli said it was better to be feared than loved.

USENET? USE THIS

Terribly helpful answers to questions posted on Usenet



I recently bought a new computer and it came with AOL, of course. I have no intention of ever using AOL. How can I get rid of it? —from alt.computer

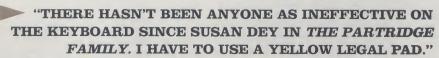


AOL can be all but impossible to dislodge from your PC. If you think stuffing the SUV with explosives and taking a road trip to Dulles, Va., might solve the problem, reconsider. Dulles is just down the road from the Pentagon, where they know a few things about security. Considering that the combined AOL Time Warner is the size of a small NATO ally, they've probably shared a secret or two.

That means you've got a colossal challenge on your hands. First, remove all AOL installation discs from your home. Next, try an industrial-strength uninstaller. If that doesn't work, reinstall Windows and reformat your hard drive. No

go? Then remove the hard drive, seal it in a hazardous-waste container, call the Environmental Protection Agency, and run like hell.





-Dennis Miller in a Yahoo Internet Life chat, when asked whether he could compose on a computer



IT'S NOT A GOOD BUY, IT'S THE BEST BUY.

DELL



PC World's #1 Best Buy Award Top 10 Midrange PCs - March 2001

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There are plenty of average "good buys" out there. Only one, however, earned PC World's #1 Best Buy Award in the category of Top 10 Midrange PCs. It's the Dell™ Dimension™ 4100, of course. The reason for all this excitement? It's because of 64MB of SDRAM, an SB Live! Value Digital Sound Card and a PCI Telephony modem included on a machine that's powered by an Intel® Pentium® III processor at 1.0GHz. We could go on and on about what makes the Dimension 4100 a best buy, but thanks to PC World, we don't have to.

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- 17" (16.0" vis) E770 Monitor
- 16MB ATI® Rage™ Pro Graphics
- 48X Max CD-ROM
- SB Live! Value Digital Sound Card
- harman/kardon® Speakers
- PCI Telephony Modem for Windows®
- MS* Windows* Me & MS* Office 2000 Small Business & Norton® AntiVirus™
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- 1-Yr NBD On-Site Service; add \$69

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- 48X Max CD-ROM Drive
- Integrated Audio with SoundBlaster Pro/16
- Integrated Intel® 10/100 NIC
- MS® Windows® Me & MS® Office 2000 Small Business & Norton® AntiVirus®
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- 48X Max CD-ROM Drive
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- Integrated 3Com® 10/100 NIC
- MS® Windows® 2000 Professional
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BUSINESS LEASE: \$30/MO., 48 MOS."

- 3-Yr NBD On-Site Service with Lifetime Phone Tech Support, add \$219
- Upgrade to CompleteCare™ Service²0 from 3-Yr NBD On-Site Service; add \$169

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- Modular Floppy Drive (Upgrade to Optical Drive or Zip)
- Internal 56K Capable Modem
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- 59WHr Li-Ion Battery
- MS® Office 2000 Small Business
- 3-Yr NBD On-Site Service⁴

599 © E-VALUE CODE 05973-890315 BUSINESS LEASE: \$44/MO., 48 MOS."

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\$1299 © E-VALUE CODE 05973-490312

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DELL™ HOME NOTEBOOKS:

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- 48X Max CD-ROM Drive
- SoundBlaster 64V PCI LC Sound Card
- PC Speakers
- 56K Capable® PCI DataFax Modem for Windows®
- MS® Works Suite 2001 MS® Windows® Me
- 1-Yr Ltd Warranty² 1-Yr At-Home Service⁴
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- harman/kardon® Speakers
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